

Have Gun Will Travel – Chapter 1 – A Knight without Honor

*Have Gun Will Travel reads the card of a man.
A knight without armor in a savage land.*

*His fast gun for hire heeds the calling wind.
A soldier of fortune is the man called Paladin.*

*Paladin, Paladin Where do you roam?
Paladin, Paladin, Far, far from home.
He travels on to wherever he must
A chess knight of silver is his badge of trust*

*There are campfire legends that the trailmen spin
Of the man with the gun
Of the man called Paladin*

*Paladin, Paladin Where do you roam?
Paladin, Paladin Far, far from home
Far from home. Far from home.*

Yeah, I know the song said a knight without armor, but I was a knight without honor. I'd gotten 'enlisted' in '68 and sent to the Republic of Vietnam. I'd burned my draft card to protest the war and was on the way to Canada when they caught up with me. That judge; he gave me a choice, of joining the Army or going to jail for 20 years. Hell, I was only 18 and I figured I'd get raped in prison or killed and if I went in the Army at least I'd have a gun to fight back with. I did my year and somehow managed to avoid getting my butt shot off and when I got back to the states, I was given a chance to go to Ranger School. I figured going to school beat the hell out of going back to Vietnam; I'd had to enlist for 4 years, for crying out loud.

So, I went to Ranger School and afterwards volunteered for the Green Berets. Anything to avoid going back to that tropical hellhole, but they said I already was in the Special Forces and they wouldn't take me. That's how I didn't get to become a Green Beret. I did get to go back to Vietnam for a second tour, lucky me. I felt like a million bucks and was as Gung Ho as a Marine. Right up until I somehow managed to step on a punji stick and get a million dollar wound. They flew me stateside and treated me at Brooks. I guess I wasn't fancy enough to go to Walter Reed. Anyway, whatever they put on that punji stick took care of any thoughts I had about a military career.

My leg just didn't heal right and I was eventually given an honorable discharge. And up to this point, my honor was intact. Yeah, yeah I know I got started off on the wrong foot, but that judge did me a favor, he got me some of the best training in the world for my second career. My leg eventually got better, after I got out of the Army, and I ended up doing a couple of turns in Africa as a merc. After that the war was over and somehow I ended up working for the government again, this time for the Agency. It seems that they

had this specialty that they didn't really talk about and I got some more training and sent to Europe. There's a euphemism for the type of work I did in Europe, but the Agency never really admitted that people like me existed.

I took a bullet and was forced to retire. They say in the movies that you never retire from the Company, but don't you believe it. I was so retired that I didn't even exist. I can't really tell you that I had any honor left at this point, but I thought that I did. Anyway the reality of my situation came sharply in focus when I got my statement from my Swiss account. I had saved a lot and perhaps diverted a few dollars and I thought I was set forever. Didn't work out that way. Here I was an ex-Ranger turned ex-merc turned ex-mechanic and I was getting short on money.

I can't tell you how I turned to the business I'm in, but stuff happens and I got ten grand for my first job. Apparently the word got out that there was a new boy in town and I got a phone call and an offer I couldn't turn down. Some boss wanted another boss eliminated and he wanted outside talent so it couldn't be traced back to him. I figured he'd probably try and take out some insurance and eliminate me. That's what I might have done if I were in his place. So I lied when I told him when and where I'd make the hit and I took care of business and then went to the location I'd given him. Sure enough, there were a couple of guys sitting in a car that had mob written all over them. I took them out and then buried them real deep let me tell you. That was risky, but I didn't have a lot of options. After I collected the remainder of my fee, I did a freebie and eliminated the guy who hired me.

That was when I hit on the Paladin gimmick. I couldn't print up a fancy card that said wire Paladin, San Francisco but I could adopt the alias. I assumed a nom d' guerre as it were and went by that single name, Paladin. What I did instead of the fancy card was put out the name and a pager number. "There was a lot of thought put into this TV series, which was not your typical Western. For one thing, his name: a Paladin was a lawful knight of Charlemagne's court. This accounts for the chess-piece knight on his calling card, and the lyrics of the theme song, which refer to him as "a knight without armor in a savage land." Paladin was a graduate of the USMA and a Union officer during the Civil War. He had honor in addition to principles.

His calling card said "Have Gun, Will Travel" and "Wire Paladin, San Francisco." (By the way, "Wire" was not his first name; it's a verb meaning "send a telegram.") Paladin, the only name he ever went by, was a true split-personality type. He was equally at home wearing expensive suits and living a rich playboy lifestyle in a San Francisco hotel, or donning his black working clothes, and avenging evil. Some of the clients he stood up for were not in the majority; for example, he once defended the Mennonites, which probably would make him seem to be a non-conformist. Paladin only cared about right and wrong. Even though he charged a fee for his services, he only took cases he believed in, and clients he wanted to help.

I was pretty much a non-conformist and the idea of resurrecting the TV hero/villain had certain appeal. I'd seen a lot of movies about so called hit men, like *The Mechanic*, *The*

Specialist, *Assassins* and of course *The Hitman* and knew that they were just movies. Never totally ignore a movie; sometimes those writers get reasonable ideas like in *The Specialist* where he always made the call from a public phone. They can even trace a cell phone, or so I'm told, but I never bothered to find out. The gimmick that Sly used was good enough for me because I got to pick the location I made the call from. But my favorite hitman was Mitch Leary/John Booth/James Carney played by John Malkovich in *In the Line of Fire*.

That's me, Paladin. Have Gun, Will Travel, for a price. A nobody is 25 large and a somebody starts at 100 large and goes up; if the name is big enough, I might insist on 7 figures. And to keep the image, I'm real picky about the cases I take. I'm not going to do some working stiff just because his old lady didn't like him. I'd be willing to tell a small portion of my story and some of my more infamous hits if you'd be interested.

Have Gun Will Travel – Chapter 2 – Project 90-003

Fee: \$250,000

Special Requirements: None

I pride myself in carrying out a client's wishes. This subject was a real piece of work, a slum landlord in New York City. Nobody I'd ever heard of and probably anonymous to the remainder of the country as well. The guy owned a dozen or more apartment buildings and rented to the disadvantaged, usually illegal aliens who couldn't go to the cops to complain. Understand that I didn't care one way or another how the guy made his living, a job was a job. Thing is that once the cops got to checking this guy out, they'd have so many suspects they might never consider it to be a professional hit.

Ritchie was my Hey Boy, but I'll be danged if I can remember how I ran into him. Probably sometime after he got out for running that computer scam. Ritchie was a genius when it came to hacking. I'd give him the name of the next possible assignment and in 24-hours he'd have a book on the victim. I always insisted on the name of the target and 24-hours to accept or decline and I always made it a point to get my client's name and his or her relationship to the target.

"This guy is a real piece of work," Ritchie announced handing me the computer printout.

"Give me the Reader's Digest version," I told Ritchie.

"The guy owns 14 apartment buildings under shell corporations which are owned by a holding company," Ritchie said. "The holding company is based in the Bahamas with no apparent ties back to the target. Anyway, from the look of the guy's bank accounts, he's making millions a year and sending it all offshore. As a front, he's a diamond merchant."

"Did you check out the relationship between the client and the target?" I asked.

"The client is the guy's partner," Ritchie said.

That squared with what the client told me and when he called back I accepted the assignment. He thought the fee was a little steep and I told him he was free to go elsewhere. But he must have been in a hurry because he asked where to send the money. I gave him the number of my Swiss bank account that was a cutout. The money would be immediately transferred to the Bahamas and disappear. Hmm, the same bank in the Bahamas, maybe I should get Ritchie to work some of his magic and transfer the money around a little bit. No, I wouldn't do that; I was a killer, not a thief.

I caught the first plane out of SFO bound for Kennedy. I checked into the Essex House on Central Park South and sat down to review the information Ritchie had provided. The Diamond district is centered on West 47th street between Fifth Avenue and Avenue of the Americas (Sixth Avenue). One block south of Rockefeller center, three blocks south of Radio City Music Hall (along Avenue of the Americas), or three blocks south of St.

Patrick's Cathedral (along Fifth Avenue). The United States is the world's largest consumer market for diamonds. Over 90 percent of the diamonds that come into this country go through New York City and most of them go through the Diamond District. More than 2,600 independent businesses are located on this block, nearly all of them related to diamonds or jewelry.

There was no way I could fulfill the contract at the guy's place of business, there would be too many people around. I didn't really assume I could and he had a plush pad on the upper west side. What I really wanted to do was get him to one of those tenement buildings of his. In those neighborhoods, he could get mugged and nobody would be the wiser. Call that plan A. But first I had to keep an eye on the guy and look for chinks in his armor. Some little idiosyncrasy I could turn to my advantage. And, I was pressed for time.

The guy must have watched Kojak on TV or something because his personal security was tight. I decided to set fire to one of those tenements and call him up and tell him the building was burning. In all of the excitement, nobody would even notice someone taking him out. I hired a couple of local thugs to roust everyone out of the apartments, and set the fire myself. Then, I went to a nearby payphone and put it a call.

"It's me," I said.

"Who is this?" he replied.

"Just wanted to let you know the building on 44th street is burning," I said.

"What building?" he asked.

"It's just the first one," I said. "Either you meet me here with 50 grand or I'll burn all of the rest."

"Meet you where?" he asked.

"In Hell's Kitchen at 44th and 11th Avenue," I said.

"How will I know you?" he asked.

"I'll know you, that's all that matters," I said and hung up.

After that, it was just a matter of waiting to see if the guy showed up. About 45 minutes later a cab pulled up and dropped the target off. He was carrying a briefcase so I assumed he'd brought the money. He just stood there looking around and finally when I was certain he was alone I approached him.

"Did you bring the money?" I asked.

“How can I be sure you won’t burn down my other buildings if I pay you?” he asked.

“There are only 2 certainties if life, brother, death and taxes,” I replied. “And from what I know of your business you seemed to be determined to avoid the latter. I guarantee you will never see me again. Hand it over.”

He handed me the briefcase and I went through the motions. There was \$50 thousand all right, used 100’s wrapped with rubber bands. He was looking around trying to find a cab to hail and I pulled out the weapon of opportunity I’d picked up at a vacant lot. It was a piece of rebar, about $\frac{3}{4}$ ” thick and 18” long. He never even saw the blow coming. He went down and I rammed that bar right into his chest. The blow probably killed him but I had to be sure. Anyway, I took the 50 grand and threw the briefcase on the ground. It wasn’t that bad of a walk back to the Essex House and I couldn’t afford to leave a trail.

The 50 G’s was a little bonus the client didn’t need to know anything about. It covered my expenses and then some and was totally untraceable. The next morning I took a shuttle to Kennedy and caught my flight back home. Almost precisely 24-hours after the target hit the ground my pager went off and I called him back.

“Did you have to be so gruesome?” the client asked.

“What are the cops saying?” I asked back.

“Said it was a mugging. Say what was in his briefcase?” he asked.

“Nothing of consequence, did you wire the money?” I wanted to know.

“Sent it this afternoon before the banks closed,” he replied.

Have Gun Will Travel – Chapter 3 – Project 93-005

Fee: \$2,500,000

Special Requirements: Republic of Georgia

Target: Zviad Konstantines dze Gamsakhurdia a dissident, scientist and writer, who became the first democratically elected President of the Republic of Georgia in the post-Soviet era.

This guy was a different matter altogether. He had been booted out of office by a coup d'état. Clashes between pro- and anti-Gamsakhurdia forces continued throughout 1992 and 1993 with Gamsakhurdia supporters taking captive government officials and government forces retaliating with reprisal raids. Man I thought hard about this one, I wasn't so sure I wanted to get anywhere near the Soviet Union or whatever they called themselves. Gamsakhurdia took advantage of the Georgian army's rout to seize large quantities of weapons abandoned by the retreating government forces. A civil war engulfed western Georgia in October 1993 as Gamsakhurdia's forces succeeded in capturing several key towns and transport hubs. Government forces fell back in disarray, leaving few obstacles between Gamsakhurdia's forces and Tblisi.

I booked passage from SFO through Kennedy to Ankara, Turkey with a stop in Athens. Ritchie got me what he could on the guy but it was mostly background stuff. With all of the incidents going on in Georgia in 1993, there wasn't too much current information to be had. I took a truck from Ankara to Hopa where I picked up the arms Ritchie was supposed to arrange for me. That was one thing about Ritchie, give him a day and he could arrange anything. He had me outfitted as one of the opposition. You know, regular clothes and a captured Russian AK-74 plus a Stechkin pistol.

We crossed over the Lesser Caucasus Mountains and across the Kolkhida Lowlands headed for Zugdidi. Just a week before, the target had returned to Georgia and set up what amounted to a "government in exile" in the western Georgian city of Zugdidi. Let me tell you this wasn't the place to be and I regretted setting the fee so low, I should have asked for 5 million. I couldn't get close to the guy even though I had made it to Zugdidi. The main problem was the language, of course, I didn't speak Georgian. Ritchie must have anticipated that because he'd arranged for a guide who spoke English. If he agreed to pay the guy too much, though, I was going to take it out of his hide.

To be honest with you, I had about given up hope of being able to get to the target when the Russians sent in 2,000 troops to help the Georgian government under Eduard Shevardnadze. That was around the last of October. All hell broke loose and Zugdidi fell on November 6th, and the target bugged out. If you go to Wikipedia and read about what happened next, you're going to get several versions of the story. You might want to click on the link down at the beginning of the section where it talks about his death and read all of the correspondence exchanged between Georgians loyal to the target and the Wikipedia editors.

Here's what really happened. My guide and I heard a rumor that the target was in a vil-

lage called Khibula. We made our way there and saw a fair sized group of pro-Shevardnadze Mkhedrioni militia. They were headed towards a building and I assumed that that was where he and his supporters were. I managed to slip into the building before the militia had it surrounded and began to look around. There were a fair number of people in the building and I was doing my best to remain unobserved. I ducked into a room to avoid a guy coming down the hall and a voice came from behind me.

“Будут вами?”

I recognized the Russian language but had no idea what the man said. I did however recognize that the target was standing right before me.

“I am an American, they call me Paladin,” I replied.

“Американско? Почему вы здесь?” he said, followed by, “American? Why are you here?”

“I’m fulfilling a contractual obligation,” I explained reaching for the Stechkin pistol.

“Что вид контрактня обязательство? What kind of a contractual obligation?” he asked.

I’m sure he understood my reply. I let a single round go getting him in the head and tossed the pistol on the ground together with a note the client had furnished. The note said, “Being in clear conscience, I commit this act in token of protest against the ruling regime in Georgia and because I am deprived of the possibility, acting as the president, to normalize the situation, to restore law and order”. I looked and I could get out of the room through a window and I had no more than cleared the sill than his bodyguards came rushing in. I hugged the building and slipped to the next side before getting the hell out of there.

The thing was, it was a bitch getting back to Turkey and I ended up darned near getting killed. I decided right then and there that any more political assassinations would start at \$5 million and go up. We obviously made it to Turkey; I’m here to tell the story. But, do you know what the most scary part of the trip was? Going through the Athens airport. Of course, 9/11/01 was still 8 years off, but jeez, they didn’t have any security at all and remember all of those hijackings? I must just live under a lucky star.

“So what did that guide cost me?” I asked Ritchie.

“\$10,000 US,” he replied.

“That much, huh? Well that’s not too bad. Plus he got the AK-74,” I responded.

“Have any trouble?” Ritchie asked.

“Ritchie, the next time I get a political job, remind me that the minimum price is \$5 mil-

lion and that I'll only do it if they speak English," I instructed.

"That bad huh?" Ritchie chuckled.

"They were in the middle of a civil war over there," I explained. "The target was safely out of Georgia but he came back. I got to Zugdidi but couldn't get close to him. The only reason I was able to fulfill the contract was because he bugged out and some pro-Shevardnadze Mkhedrioni militia found him and we heard a rumor."

"There hasn't been any announcement of his death," Ritchie announced.

"They can't keep it a secret forever," I said. "As soon as they announce it, I'll get my phone call."

I did on January 6th, 1994. The remaining \$1.25 million was transferred into my Swiss account and made it to the Bahamas the same day. I did have one thing in common with that New York Landlord. I didn't pay taxes on this particular income. I had a legitimate job as a security consultant and I had a CPA handling that money. As far as the IRS was concerned, I reported every penny I made. Ritchie was the 'office manager' for the security company and I paid him very well indeed. Hell, Ritchie would have probably paid me for the job. I kept him in every computer toy his heart desired. Why not, it was all a legitimate business expense?

Say I forgot to mention who the client was. Some guy on the staff of the Georgian Embassy and he had no connection whatever to the target. But, the target and the new President of Georgia, Eduard Shevardnadze, were bitter enemies. I can't get involved in politics, there are always two, or more, sides and you never know who might hire you. This project didn't get much attention in the media and what press play it did get was totally contradictory.

"So Ritchie," I said, "What say we shut down the office and head for Mexico? I could use a week or two in Puerto Vallarta."

"Why not?" Ritchie replied, "We'll charge it to a business conference and if they need to reach you, you have that Iridium Global Satellite Paging Service."

Have Gun Will Travel – Chapter 4 – Project 96-001

This wasn't your typical project, not one bit. Harry Callahan said, "A man's got to know his limitations." Well, I knew mine and after that last job in 1995 realized that I had maybe pissed off the wrong people. I saw an ad for an abandoned missile silo and we went to check it out. It was at Walker AFB near Roswell, NM. I could see the potential in the place and after that last job in 1995 money wasn't a problem so I bought it lock, stock, and barrel.

"Ritchie once we get this place cleaned out and fixed up, you won't have to worry about EMP anymore," I told him.

"Yeah and the beauty of it is that we can capitalize the silo and write it off over 40 years," he replied.

"Like hell we can," I told him, "This place is going to be our little secret. Hire us a contractor to get the place repainted and rewired so we can see what I bought. I'll make myself a loan out of that shell corporation we set up for the Bahamas bank account."

"I'm telling you, boss, you're making a mistake," Ritchie insisted. "Look, we can get one of those private post office boxes at a place in Roswell and use that for our mailing address. Then we'll capitalize the 'building' and write it off over 40 years. On top of that, you can pay yourself interest on the loan and you'll end up with negative income and positive cash flow, the best of both worlds."

"You sure about that Ritchie?" I asked.

"Hell, boss, the doctors do it all the time," he assured me.

"Ok, set it up with the CPA and I'll transfer the money to the security company," I told him.

"Make sure you transfer enough to rehabilitate the place," he urged.

"How much do figure we're going to need?" I asked.

"By the time you get it all fixed up and decked out, probably about double what you're going to pay for the silo," he guessed.

I decided right then and there to take the first 6 months of 1996 off. We went into Roswell and got a motel and I called the Bahamas and arranged for the transfer of the money. The next day we went to the realtor who was handling the transaction and I wrote him a check for the silo. The silo was dry and had been vandalized, but there was nothing that money couldn't repair. I'd bought the place for a song, but before I had it finished, I'd be singing a different tune. But, I had to admit that I could get used to not killing people for a living.

A friend wrote to tell me, "I have a friend that was a Lt. with the Texarkana, TX Police Department. He was a sniper for the Army in 'Nam. The guy that trained him in his field was the sniper for the Police Department that took out the McDonald's killer in CA. We didn't talk much about what he did but he did tell me this after me asking 'How in the hell do you train to do this job?' To desensitize yourself to the 'hit' you aimed your rifle at the target and in your mind you'd go 'BANG, BANG, BANG', again and again and again and again. And then when you really do pull the trigger it's no big deal. It's just another 'BANG'."

She went on, "Another friend was from LA 'the swamps' and he was a crack shot in the late '70's for his college. He was recruited by the Army, or someone; he didn't really say, and trained for behind the lines espionage. He was dropped somewhere in some rag-head country with only a radio, pocketknife, some water and very little food for a job that was to last two weeks. He was to watch a road and report the traffic. He found a very small cave and started his watch. A few days later a Shepherd's dog discovered him and he had to kill the dog and drag him into his cave. The Shepherd came looking for him and he had to kill the Shepherd. The Shepherd was a kid about 14 and it liked to have killed 'Mike' too. He never got over it. When I met him was about 8 years later and he still had nightmares over it. He was always trying to find some way to tell his story to let people know it is not as easy to kill as some think. Not that he didn't think it wasn't necessary, just that it's not an easy job. Of course then if he had told his story he would have 'disappeared'." (With thanks to a friend)

She was right you know. It wasn't easy to kill someone even if they 'deserved' it. And the more I did it the more I wanted out of the business. I always figured that you were born with just so much luck and when your luck ran out, you'd better duck or you were dead. That's why I bought a missile silo. They were supposed to be impregnable and could withstand a 1-megaton bomb as close as a 1-mile away. Ritchie got the place re-wired and ordered a generator from Cummings Power Generation. The government put in a well for the company at no charge, something about removing pollution.

The command building had 2 levels, each 40 feet in diameter. Access was by stairs and through two blast-proof doors. Each level had about 2,363 square feet of floor space not including stairway or vestibule. Due to insulation of the earth, heating and cooling needs were minimal. The missile silo was a huge structure 50 feet in diameter and approximately 185 feet deep. Access was from a 40-foot tunnel leading from the command-building stairway. The missile silo had an approximate volume of 363,062 cubic feet. If I built a deck in the silo, it would have 1962 square feet of floor space. I speculated that I could build about 14 floors in the silo with 12' ceilings and extra strong floors.

To make things better there were storage tanks for the oxidizer and fuel plus several water tanks. I was sure we could clean all of the tanks out and use one for gas and one for diesel. Maybe I'd have to replace the water tanks, but that would be a small price to pay. The realtor told me that there was storage for 2.5 million gallons, not counting the water. And that generator Ritchie ordered, I don't know what he was thinking. It was a

Cumming Power DFCL that was capable of 1250 kW, 1563 kVA in Standby mode and 1100 kW, 1375 kVA in Prime mode. As a Prime power unit, it burned anywhere from 23.6gph at ¼ power to 76.9gph at full power. I guess it was a good thing we had such big fuel tanks.

I sat down and figured it out that if we were stuck in the silo for a year and running at full power, we'd need 365.25 times 24 times 76.9 or 674,105.4-gallons of diesel. I was really worried until I got the total-I mean really, 77gph? Then Ritchie gave me the spec sheet on the generator. That sucker used 177 quarts of oil. I figured I'd have to buy engine oil by the 55-gallon drum, not to mention oil, air and fuel filters and spare parts. The project was starting to get away from me; I'd never intended anything like it was turning into. It was sort of like eating peanuts, once you got started, you couldn't stop.

Ritchie said I was foolish to waste the space on 12' ceilings and if I built 8' ceilings we could have a 21-story facility in the silo. I was going to tell him not just no but HELL NO, when he pointed out that I could loan myself more money, I had plenty, and charge myself more interest and depreciate a more expensive building. He must have lost me at a turn because what he said almost made sense and before I knew it I'd told him to go ahead. Later I realized that Ritchie had run one by me and I was going to object. But Ritchie didn't let any moss grow on his sneakers and the contractor already had 2 floors in.

We, I, was still ok on money and I really did want to take 1996 off. It was getting bad enough that when the banker in the Bahamas heard my voice on the phone, he only had one question, "How much?" And every time I called he kept telling me to put my money in gold. But, it had started out a little over \$400 an ounce in January of 1996 and by July, the price was down to about \$375 so I told him no. It wasn't quite time to put my money into gold just yet. I figured that sooner or later the price would get down to about \$250 an ounce and I'd pounce.

It sure was good that 1995 had been my personal best the way Ritchie was spending my money. I'd done 6 jobs and these weren't NYC landlords, any of them. Two were small but four were big and I'd added about \$7.5 million to the \$7.5 million I had socked away, doubling my holdings. The banks in the Bahamas were earning big money for me by making selective investments in those Internet Companies. It was almost like they had insider information, but they probably didn't. They were getting a healthy fee for their services but my money was growing by leaps and bounds. It figured that one of these days that would all end, too. Either the Internet bubble would burst or they'd change their banking regulations or both.

At the moment, however, I was sitting in tall cotton and wasn't particularly spending money any faster than my assets were earning it. By the end of 1996, we had the silo completed and outfitted, or so I thought. It was completed, but Ritchie wasn't quite done with the outfitting. I told him that from now on he was going to need to limit his spending to the money I earned. There was a lot of money floating around in 1997, let me tell you. The security company showed a handsome profit and Paladin Enterprises, a Bahamian

company, earned a cool \$10 million on 7 jobs. I know you probably want to hear about projects 97-001 through 97-007, but I'm not going to tell you. I've probably already said too much.

The security company had a very positive cash flow but Ritchie was right, we lost money. We had all of that interest expense on top of depreciation amounting to 2.5% of my prior year's investment in the silo and the building improvements. The accountant said to just use 40-year, straight-line depreciation and that was 2.5% for 40-years. Some things, like the generator for example, could be written off over a shorter period, like 10-years. Ritchie took me at my word, too and every penny the security firm made either went for rent, utilities, taxes or into the silo.

Ritchie put a Hewlett-Packard mini-computer and a T-3 line into the silo and had power run to the site. He told me with the new stuff there in New Mexico we could run the shop from there and save costs. Specifically, we could eliminate the cost of rent for an office and our utilities would be about the same. He also said that if the employer could show a legitimate reason for him to live onsite that we could live at the shelter and he wouldn't have to pay any income tax on his free living expenses. He must have huddled with the CPA when I'd been off on one of those 7 jobs.

I told Ritchie to generate a letter for me to sign and he dipped into a folder and fished out something that he and the CPA must have dreamed up. I signed the dang thing because I needed to take some time off anyway. We headed to Puerto Vallarta to spend Christmas and New Year's. Man did we have a good time. I met this redhead from Los Angeles, Stacy was her name, and we hit it off very well. She was just the type of girl I'd like to settle down with and marry, someday. Ritchie had fun too, in a geekish sort of way. Spent all of his time in an Internet Café surfing the web.

"So, boss, what's with the redhead?" Ritchie asked. "You thinking about retiring and taking up the domestic way of life?"

"I think this coming year we should be more selective in the contracts I take, Ritchie," I told him. "You know the risks are the same whether it's a \$25,000 job or a \$5,000,000 job. Maybe I can just get a couple of big jobs in '98 and spend more time working on security consulting and the silo."

"Does that mean you're willing to move the business?" he asked.

"Why not?" I replied. "I might even be able to get to Los Angeles from time to time."

"Good because the lease is up on the office on January 31st and they've been bugging me about renewing it," he replied. "I'll take care of getting everything moved. What about your condo?"

"Put it on the market and get what you can," I told him. "Whatever you get out of it can

be spent on the silo.”

Have Gun Will Travel – Chapter 5 – One Last Job

Like I said, I was getting mighty tired of killing people for a living. There was a time when the cops weren't too smart but now they were getting into DNA and all of the scientific stuff. There was just no way you could do a job up close and personal anymore because you'd leave something behind and some whiz kid in a lab somewhere would find it and somehow trace it to you. I'd told Ritchie that I wasn't going to do the small jobs anymore and I had until July before a big job came along.

In the meantime, Ritchie had moved the office to the silo and set it up on the top floor of the command center. The second floor of the command center looked more like mission control in Houston to me. Ritchie had a computer on every desk and they were all networked to that HP mini-computer. He called that the server and said the computers on the desks were clients. I wasn't all that much into using computers so Ritchie just kept nagging until I caved in. It was amazing what he had stored on that server, topo maps and everything.

"Boss, we've got to equip those 21-floors in the silo," Ritchie insisted one day.

"Not until I do a job Ritchie," I told him. "You've spent enough money. But if you want to shop around and locate the best prices on stuff, I'll buy as much of it as I can with the money I get from the next job I do."

That was in May I'd told him that. Man, could he make those computers do all of his work. Then in July I got a job I couldn't turn down, \$10 million for one guy. That's right \$10 million. I immediately knew I should turn it down, but it was \$10 followed by 6 zeros and that was more money than I had made on 7 jobs the previous year. Ritchie checked out the target and the client and everything seemed to be perfectly legitimate, if I dare use the term. So, I took the job and \$5 million was deposited in my Swiss account and transferred to the Bahamas. The minute Ritchie saw the money in my Bahamian bank account he was all over me to transfer the money to the corporate account.

"How the hell do you know the money is in my account in the Bahamas?" I asked.

"I hacked the bank and checked," he replied.

"You not supposed to be able to do that," I protested.

"There probably are a dozen people in the world who can and you're just lucky to have one of them on your payroll," he laughed.

"I'll transfer the money, but you can only have \$4 million," I told him. "I have a feeling that this job is going to be awfully tough. I may require more operating capital than usual."

The truth was I didn't want Ritchie blowing the whole \$5 million on the silo. The darned

place had only cost me \$150,000 and the improvements were only supposed to cost another \$150,000. To date, we had spent closer to \$1 million and the place wasn't even fully equipped. The idea of letting him get his hands on that much money all at once sent shivers down my spine. I had visions of gold plated computers on all of the desks and God only knows what else. This job was to be in the City of Angels but I didn't believe in mixing business with pleasure. Ritchie and I knew who I was and not another living soul, at least not until now, knew my real identity. I planned to keep it that way. Once I got to LA and checked the job out, I was back on the phone to Ritchie in a heartbeat.

"Ritchie, I think I may do a little hunting while I'm here in California," I said. "Do you remember that rifle I was telling you about?"

"Yeah boss, I remember," he answered.

"Pick one up for the company back east and bring it to me here in LA," I told him. "Make sure it's fully equipped."

"Rog, I'll be there tomorrow," he answered.

Basically I had told him to take some of that money that he'd transferred from the Bahamian account and that I hadn't taken and use it to buy a Barrett M82A1. I wanted it outfitted with a Swarovski LRS, 3-12x50mm objective, with a laser range finder. I also wanted the rifle equipped with a model BT8 Telescopic Reflex Suppressor and I wanted match grade armor piercing ammunition. Barrett would later rename the rifle the model M107 to reflect the new name given to the rifle when the Army formally adopted it in 2003-4. And, I wanted it tomorrow.

"Hey boss, I had to drive all night," Ritchie said.

"Did you get what I wanted?" I asked.

"Yeah, but don't asked me how much I spent," he laughed.

"I can guess about double what the stuff would usually cost to be able to get it here overnight," I grinned.

"At least," Ritchie said.

"So head back to New Mexico and I'll see you when I'm done with the job," I directed.

"Might be a good idea for you to retire after this one," Ritchie said. "With the money you already have in that bank account and the other half of this job, you'll be set for life."

"I was thinking the same thing myself Ritchie," I admitted.

I was too; getting a \$10,000,000 contract was a once in a lifetime deal. Even if Ritchie spent the entire \$4 million, and I was sure he wouldn't, I'd have for sure \$20 million in the bank. I figured with a little good luck maybe I could turn that \$20 into \$40. The Internet boom couldn't last much longer and the price of gold had to drop pretty soon. Besides I rather fancied Stacy and had the impression that it was mutual. Once I had this score done, I'd drop the Paladin handle and switch to the name I'd given Stacy. You know how it is, right? You need the ability to disappear at a moment's notice and reappear as someone else. I had a Swiss Passport under an assumed identity, American Passports under my real name and one assumed identity and a British Passport on a 3rd assumed identity. The only set I never used were the papers in my real name.

I guess I underestimated Ritchie. As I was later to learn, in my absence he filled both of the fuel tanks and blended in a stabilizer when he did. The smaller tank and the larger tank both got diesel fuel and he added a smaller still 18,000-gallon tank for gasoline. He had a line on used military bunk beds and he'd bought enough to put 130 bunks on each of 6 floors (780). He fitted 3 floors out as combination dining/recreation rooms complete with big screen TV's (2 per floor) and tables and chairs. Two more of the floors were equipped for the storage of arms and ammunition leaving 10 floors for the storage of supplies. And he'd managed to blow the whole \$4 million.

This target was somebody I'd never heard of. He traveled everywhere in a bulletproof limo and had a flock of bodyguards. He lived in a mansion in Bel-Air and I had to go cross-country to check the place out. The guards at the mansion were very discrete, dressed in business suits carefully tailored to conceal the bulge of the micro-Uzi's they carried. I wouldn't have even known about those except something startled one of them one night and that machine pistol came out in a flash. This guy had better protection than the President of the county, Bill Clinton. Him, I'd have done for free. Kennedy had at least managed to keep his philandering out of the press. On the other hand, considering the bimbo he was married to, I'd have probably done the same.

I'd ordered the rifle because it was evident from the outset that this was going to be a long range hit. I'd taken a day off and gone up to the Angeles National Forest to one of the illicit shooting ranges and sighted in the rifle. By the end of the day, I was putting all of my shots in the 8, 9 or 10 rings on a full sized silhouette at 1,000-yards. Three old geezers showed up to shoot their rifles, but we ignored each other. I did notice that they all had M1A's fixed up with powerful scopes, suppressors and were using 20-round magazines. Didn't those old farts know that was illegal in California? Two short white guys and one tall slender black fellow. One of the short guys was real roly-poly and the other looked like warmed over death. He was using a cane, this third guy. Regular sniper rifles and they weren't doing any better at 300-yards than I was at 1,000. All except the guy with the cane; he was doing real good out to 600-yards.

With the rifle ready to go, I only had to pick a time and a place where I could get a clear shot at the guy. Easier said than done. I got a page from Ritchie on the pager and called him back. He had 'the' pager in case we got a call for another job and I had the backup. The client was getting anxious and wanted the deal closed within 5 days. I was ready

anyway, because I'd found the chink in this guy's armor. Millions for defense but not a penny for tribute. Yeah right. The target was divorced and remarried and one day a week he took time off to spend with his daughter.

This was when the whole thing got dicey. The daughter was Stacy and every Saturday morning Stacy and her father got together. He usually drove himself in an old beater and was dressed casually. If you didn't know it was him, you'd have never have recognized him. No way was I going to get him while he was with Stacy but on the way to and from, he was especially vulnerable. Man was I torn; the target was the father of the woman I'd come to adore. But, I'd taken the down payment and didn't know it yet but Ritchie had spent it. I wanted to walk away clean with my reputation intact and the following Saturday, I took him out on his way back to the mansion. What a bummer.

I packed up and headed for New Mexico. By the time I got there, Ritchie had taken the call and the money was safely in my Bahamas bank account. That was it; I was hanging up the gun belt. I had most of the million I'd reserved out of the down payment and though Ritchie had gone through the \$4 million in my absence, there was little left undone. Ritchie had even stocked the armories, buying out several distributors' supplies of M1A rifles and filling in with Steyr AUGs. Ritchie was more survival oriented than I was in one sense because he was an organizer. Me, I was just the ex-protester turned ex-grunt turned ex-ranger turned ex-merc turned ex-CIA hit man turned ex-assassin. From now on, I was a full time security consultant.

Ammo wise, Richie's research showed him that Hornady had the best bang for the buck on the 5.56 and 7.62 and he loaded up with match grade ammo. He'd acquired pistols in 9mm and .45ACP and chose Speer as his ammo source. The pistols? Mostly Glocks plus Browning Hi-Powers and HK USP Tactical's. FMJ ammo for practice and JHP for 'duty' use. He spent almost as much on accessories as on the weapons, if not more.

I got over to LA to see Stacy quite a bit. It was kind of funny; she hadn't called the pager when her Dad had been killed. About the only thing she said about it was that her Dad had died. Strange, very strange. We were married in July of 1999 in a quiet ceremony in Las Vegas. She quit her job at the Albertson's and sold off most of her things. I'd fixed a nice little apartment up on the floor connecting the command center to the silo. The following month the price of gold hit \$250 an ounce on the London exchange and I converted \$15 million to gold. I noticed that Stacy was on the phone to someone, but didn't eavesdrop.

"Ritchie, how good is your access to my Bahamian bank account?" I asked.

"What do you need boss, money transferred in or out?" he laughed.

"Can you get all of my remaining millions out of that account without leaving a trace?" I asked.

"I can move it to the Swiss account and from there to the corporate account," he an-

nounced. "Then, I can go back in and erase every trace of the transactions. The Bahamians won't have a clue where the money went and there won't be anything for them to trace. I'll call the corporate bank and tell them to expect a large transfer from Switzerland."

"What about that money the Realtor had?"

"Well... I figured you'd change your mind and moved it to Switzerland, then to the corporate account, then back to the second Swiss account and finally to your Bahamas account."

"When were you going to tell me?"

"I just did. Want me to move it all?"

"Do it," I told him. I wasn't a killer anymore so why not be a thief?

"Stacy, I've got to go to the Bahamas and take care of some banking business, would you like to come along and make it a holiday?" I asked.

"I need to go there anyway, honey," she said, "I've got some banking business to take care of myself."

"Really?" I replied.

"How did a gal who worked in a grocery store get enough money to need a Bahamian bank account?" I asked.

"Terms of the Trust Fund my father set up when he and my mother got divorced," Stacy explained. "I got \$25 million in a Trust Fund that became mine when I turned 30. By the time I got my hands on the money, it was closer to \$35 million, but I had to spend some money on something very special so I only have \$25 million left. I converted \$20 million to gold and left the other five million in the bank. I overheard you talking to Ritchie and I persuaded him to do the same thing with my account. So, instead of you having \$5 million plus in your corporate account, you have \$10 million plus."

"What did you spend the \$10 million on?" I asked.

"Oh, I hired you to kill Daddy Dearest, Paladin," she replied with a glint in her eye. "He was the most miserable SOB I've ever known in my whole life."

I was standing there catching flies with my mouth. You could have knocked me over with a feather, I'm telling you. You'd have never have known it to look at Stacy, 5'9" tall, slender with a figure that could have made her a centerfold. Shoulder length red hair, her natural color, and maybe 120 pounds soaking wet, and a cold-blooded killer to boot. The client isn't any different than the mechanic. They're every bit as guilty of the murder

and in many jurisdictions, the fact that they hired the killing constitutes a special circumstance and makes them eligible for the death penalty.

It turns out that Stacy also knew a hacker who knew Ritchie. Apparently Ritchie had said something to the gal and she'd put 2 and 2 together and shared the information with Stacy. I'd have to have a talk with Ritchie about his big mouth, one of these days. On the other hand he told me he was thinking of getting married to a gal from LA who was a geek like he was. He gave me her name and I dropped it on Stacy and she smiled. Small world isn't it?

Once Stacy and I got to Freeport, we split up and she went to her bank and I went to mine.

"I'm William Paladin and I'd like to talk to an officer about closing my business account," I told the receptionist.

"It will be just a moment Mr. Paladin, he's with another customer," she told me.

"Mr. Paladin, I'm John Buckley, and I don't believe I ever had the pleasure," the VP said. "I'm sorry, but would you happen to have any identification, we can't be too careful you know."

"Here's my passport and my International Driver's License," I said handing the documents over. "I've got a couple of credit cards if you'd like to see them."

"No, that will be sufficient. What can I do for you Mr. Paladin?" Buckley asked.

"I want to arrange for the transfer of the gold back to the States and I want to close my account," I told him handing him the last statement from the account. "According to that statement, I have \$15 million in gold and a little over \$6 million in my checking account."

"That's right," he assured me, "I handled the gold purchase personally. Let me check on the balance in your checking account. How do you want that, will a bank check be ok?"

"Sure why not," I told him, noticing him blanch when he brought up the account information. "Is something wrong?"

"According to our computer your checking balance is zero," he replied. "I'm sure it's just an error, but I'll have to investigate."

"Investigate all you want," I told him, "But you have 24-hours to transfer my gold and come up with a check for the balance in that account plus interest accrued since the last statement."

"Where are you staying?" he asked.

“My wife and I are at the Paradise Cove Beach Resort, Cottage 3,” I told him. “24-hours, remember.”

“How did it go?” I asked her.

“The bank official turned as white as a ghost when he saw my money was missing,” she laughed. “I gave him 24-hours to transfer the gold and find my money.”

“Yeah, I did the same thing, babe,” I replied, “How’s about you get in that swimming suit of yours and we do some snorkeling?”

I could give a crap about snorkeling, but Stacy was something else in a swimming suit. Thing was she never made it into the suit.

Have Gun Will Travel – Chapter 6 – Life’s Getting Interesting

I suppose I should take some time out and tell you a little more about myself. I was born in 1950 in Los Angeles, California. Never got out of the city until I’d headed to Canada to avoid the draft. It doesn’t matter what my real name is because I didn’t use it anyway. The name I’d given Stacy was William Rogers and I had all of the papers to back it up. It was the name I used in connection with the security consulting business. So, when Stacy and I got married in ‘99 in Vegas, I’d just turned 49. Funny, I was born on the 4th of July. I was 5’11” tall, and weighed in around 165. I worked out a lot and stopped just short of bulking up the muscles. To look at me, I was just an ordinary guy graying slightly at the temples.

I’ve described Stacy to you; man was she easy to look at. Now I don’t really want to get too personal, but I can tell you that in the bedroom we had very similar tastes. It was usually a no holds barred free-for-all. It was 2000 now and Stacy was expecting. She kept rubbing cocoa butter on her belly to keep from getting stretch marks. Did you ever notice how a pregnant woman just seems to glow? Man, she was positively radiant. Ritchie and Norma got married and I had him convert the floor above ours into an apartment for the two of them. Ritchie, as I told you, didn’t have any moss on his sneakers and Norma was pregnant, too.

Let’s talk about Stacy and my gold for a minute. A standard mint ingot is about 400 troy ounces of gold. At \$250 an ounce, the ingots cost us \$100,000 apiece, not counting the commission, which we both managed to get down to 4%. I bought \$15 million and had 150 ingots and Stacy had 200 ingots. We took about half of the money (\$5 million) out of the corporate account and bought some of the pre-1965 silver coins with 90% silver at \$5 an ounce. Those 350 gold bars weighed 27.5 pounds apiece, so I guess we had about 9,625 pounds of gold stored under the floorboards of the silo’s bottom floor together with about 68,750 pounds of coins.

The idea was that we’d hold on to the gold until it hit about \$400 an ounce. Then, we’d convert 50 ingots to Krugerrands or Eagles and unload the rest. At \$400 an ounce, we’d get \$48 million for the gold. We were going to watch the silver price, too and if it ever hit \$8 an ounce, we were going to unload 90% of it. Gold and silver are nice, but you can’t eat them. Stacy and I had a daughter and named her Teresa Marie. She came out at a whopping 6#9oz. Ritchie and Norma had a baby boy who they named Robert David. Little Bobbie came out at 9#2oz.

There was that entire bugaboo about the Y2k thing but Ritchie and Norma assured us that our computers systems were sound. I’ll bet we could have sold the silo for about double our investment in the fall of 1999. What the hell, it would just mean finding some place less secure to live so we said to hell with it. Up to this point, we hadn’t given much thought to what we were going to do with all of those beds, weapons and supplies. But with 2 pregnant women on our hands, neither Ritchie nor I had any intention of moving.

In the spring of 2000, after the babies were born, I made Ritchie a full partner in the se-

curity business. He'd set up some sort of website and was marketing information search services and by this time, that was the majority of our income, so it was the least I could do. He'd bought a newer generation of computers and installed a bigger T-3 line, whatever that is; twenty-eight T-1 lines as he'd explained it. I looked and learned that T what he really said was that he'd increased the speed to OC-12. It meant replacing the copper lines with fiber optics and putting in some additional equipment, but that was strictly his show. He was talking about something called blade servers whatever in the hell they are.

I didn't work much, just the occasional consulting job at a flat rate of \$400 an hour. It was mostly advising people how to plug leaks in their personal security systems for their corporate executives. Boring, but entirely legal. Plus I charged \$200 an hour for travel time so I was making money door-to-door. We'd taken one of the empty storage floors and set up a medical clinic and had a regular hospital and even a dentist chair. We didn't have a doctor or a dentist, but we had all of the equipment and supplies. Norma claimed that most drugs were good for a lot longer than what the labels said and she programmed everything into a computer and set up an automatic reorder system.

The business cleared 7 figures, approaching 8, during the year 2000 most of it due to Ritchie and those computers of his. We'd ended up hiring about two-dozen married people that Ritchie and Norma knew and they lived in Roswell and commuted to work. Plus we had to hire a janitorial service full time to keep the silo and command center clean. We had a lot of people on the payroll by this time. And Norma and Stacy got pregnant again. I told Ritchie to lay in a big supply of disposable diapers; he could use a full floor in the silo. And, as far as I was concerned he could fill another floor with cigarettes and toilet paper.

Ritchie had spent a large fortune on food for the shelter. He said we had enough food for the foreseeable population for up to 2 years. And, I've got to tell you, I was beginning to feel my age. Turned 50 on July 4, 2000 and they had one of those parties with all of the junk from one of the party stores. That was the last darned thing I needed was to be reminded that I had reached middle age. I was actually giving some thought to dying the hair at my temples to look a little younger, but Stacy said that she thought it made me look 'distinguished'.

"How big of a litter are you planning on having?" I asked Stacy.

"Well, handsome, the doctor says it is twins so I guess at least 3," she laughed.

"Twins?" I responded. "How in the hell did that happen?"

"Come to bed and I'll show you," she said. Well I was always in favor of getting an education so I accepted the instruction with barely a whimper.

"Do you understand now?" she asked.

“Maybe if we cover it just one more time, I will,” I replied.

Dang, I was so worn out after that, I was almost limping. But I was well educated, I can tell you that! Say, I didn't really explain how we'd made out with those Bahamian bankers, did I? They huffed and puffed and Stacy and I each got a lawyer. She was still going by her maiden name as far as the bank was concerned and I'd gotten her a second set of papers that matched my Bill Rogers identity. Eventually the banks figured out they'd been robbed but there wasn't a trace of who'd done it. They had to settle up with us for the full balances of our accounts together with accrued interest and legal fees. I went back and looked at all the bank fees I'd paid them over the years and it looked to me like they'd still made a profit, just not quite as much as they'd planned. On Stacy's account, it was a different story; they'd actually lost money on her. But, when you figured in the 4% they charged for acquiring the gold, they didn't get hurt too bad.

Anyway, we had that extra \$14 million and we converted it to Euros on January 2, 2001 and deposited it in a Swiss bank. Things were going along great and in 2001 I had turned 51. The business was making money hand over fist and I'd given up consulting entirely to stay at the silo and manage security. They'd brought out those Hummers and I bought a dozen. Should have bought them earlier, the price really went up. I put a bug in Ritchie's ear and he went looking. He hooked us up with a guy who had a dozen Ma Deuces and we had the Hummer's modified to accept a ring mount for the machine guns. Of course, we kept the machine guns in the armory and put the seats back in. Looked like Hummers with sunroofs.

Yes of course the machine guns were registered. I didn't want the feds snooping around. We had them stored in a separate armory all of their own just in case the feds came looking. Now, you realize of course that those M16's were an entirely different story, right? They were hotter than a Saturday Night Special after you'd burned off 3 clips. I was a murderer, a thief and now the proud owner of about 400 stolen guns. I tried to spend a lot of time above ground to get used to the heat. I didn't figure Heaven was in the picture for a bad boy like me. I'd broken two of the Commandments, one several times. If God would keep Moses out of the Promised Land for one Egyptian guard, what chance did I have?

Stacy had two baby girls in August of 2001. The first one out got tagged with the handle Mary Elizabeth and the second one out with Ashley Suzanne. They were little things, just under 6 pounds each. Teresa Marie, Mary Elizabeth and Ashley Suzanne; dang was this going to be expensive in about 20 years. And on the first of September, Norma became the proud mother of twin boys, Donald Harry and Paul Wayne, about 7½ pounds each. They had Robert David, Donald Harry and Paul Wayne, what a set of bookends. Maybe I'd get lucky and Ritchie's boys would marry my girls and we could split the cost of the weddings.

“Jeez Louise, what do you mean they hit the World Trade Center and the Pentagon?” I asked. “Who hit the WTC and the Pentagon?”

“Must be terrorists’ boss,” Ritchie said. “There was another plane crashed in Pennsylvania that had been hijacked, too.”

“If you want me, I’ll be glued to a TV,” I told him and headed for one of the dining/recreation rooms in the silo.

I couldn’t believe my eyes, four airliners had been hijacked and 2 of them had been flown into the WTC Towers in New York. A 3rd jet had slammed into the Pentagon and the broadcasters were debating what the target of that 4th jet was. Bush was off somewhere in the country, Sarasota, Florida, I think they said, and was now scooting around the country in Air Force One. Wait, make that Offutt Air Force Base in Omaha, Nebraska, and the President is in a secure location. That evening, Bush was on TV delivering a speech:

Today, our nation saw evil, the very worst of human nature. And we responded with the best of America – with the daring of our rescue workers, with the caring for strangers and neighbors who came to give blood and help in any way they could.

Immediately following the first attack, I implemented our government’s emergency response plans. Our military is powerful, and it’s prepared. Our emergency teams are working in New York City and Washington, DC to help with local rescue efforts.

Our first priority is to get help to those who have been injured, and to take every precaution to protect our citizens at home and around the world from further attacks...

This is a day when all Americans from every walk of life unite in our resolve for justice and peace. America has stood down enemies before, and we will do so this time. None of us will ever forget this day. Yet, we go forward to defend freedom and all that is good and just in our world.

Thank you. Good night and God bless America.

Within a week they had identified the hijackers. But, some of the identities proved to be wrong because of stolen identities. There was a really good summary in the Guardian that summarized who was and wasn’t involved. Then Bush declared a ‘War on Terror’ and began going after some guy named bin Laden in Afghanistan. Bin Laden was a Saudi who apparently was angry at the US over the Gulf war. Ritchie and I talked about how things were shaping up and I warned him.

“You know Ritchie, it’s just a matter of time before the President goes after Saddam Hussein,” I told him. “His father didn’t after the Gulf war and I’ll bet dimes to donuts that George will finish what his father didn’t.”

“Have you seen all of those conspiracy theories on the Internet?” Ritchie asked.

“No, I haven’t been surfing the web much, tell me what you’ve seen,” I directed.

“Man I’ve even seen one website that claims the actual hijackers were Israelis,” he said.

“That’s a bunch of crap, Ritchie,” I replied. “Whether they know the true identities of all the hijackers or not, there is ample evidence of who some of them were. I can’t see the Israelis working with the Arabs on any plot to get the US involved in a war. I’m telling you, Bush is going to go back to Iraq one of these days.”

He did, too in March of 2003. I’d hoped against hope that I’d been wrong, but the man did just exactly as I predicted. Then on May 1, 2003 George W. Bush landed on the aircraft carrier CVN Abraham Lincoln, in a Lockheed S-3 Viking, where he gave a speech announcing the end of major combat operations in the Iraq war. Clearly visible in the background was a banner stating “Mission Accomplished”. Bush’s landing was criticized by opponents as an overly theatrical and expensive stunt. The banner, made by White House personnel (according to a CNN story) and placed there by the US Navy, was criticized as premature – especially later as the guerrilla war dragged on.

Stacy and I converted 50 ingots to coins in January of 2004 when gold hit \$425 on the London Market and sold the other 300, clearing about \$49 million that we immediately converted to Euros and deposited in the Swiss account. We unloaded 90% of the silver when it hit \$8.25 an ounce on April 2, accepting payment in dollars, converting them to Euros and depositing that money in Switzerland, too. The silver transactions were nearly as lucrative as the gold transactions, and we only added about \$7.4 million USD. Whoever said that crime didn’t pay must have been talking about the hereafter.

I not going to make any excuses for my behavior, I always went against the grain anyway. Hell before I got caught and forced into the Army, I was a pacifist. But they taught me to kill and to be able to live with it, more or less. It was the living with it that was getting to me. With the sole exception of that guy over in Georgia, every one of the people I’d eliminated was a stain on society. Mostly that was why I was in Roswell New Mexico hiding in a silo. Stacy’s Dad was a mobster, which explained why he had such tight security. She didn’t say but I suspected there was more to that story. I remember one night we were watching TV and a program about incest came on. Stacy reacted like she’d been shot and immediately changed the channel. I wasn’t sure and I figured she’d tell me if she wanted me to know so I dropped it.

So, I’m maybe going to hell but I’ve got a few good years left to try and set things right. Apparently I haven’t committed any sins that would totally bar me from Heaven. I haven’t been big on taking the Lord’s name in vain and I haven’t blasphemed, at least I don’t think so. And, the Bible didn’t say that Moses didn’t go to Heaven, just that he was barred from the Promised Land. To tell you the absolute truth, I have no interest in going to Israel anyway. Ain’t none of those Jews going to Heaven any faster than me, they stole a whole country. Twice! First they took it from the Canaanites and second from the Palestinians. And, I don’t see anywhere in the Bible where God gave it to them 2 times, only once.

The Euros went up so good that towards the end of 2004 we converted all of our money back to dollars and moved it out of that Swiss bank and back to somewhere in the US. Investing in those Euros had been a pretty good thing. It went crazy on the market and we ended up with over \$100 million in good old US dollars. You know, Europe is as old as dirt and one of these days they'd get their comeuppance and the US dollar would be better than gold. 'Sides better to have the money back at home than in the hands of those Nazi collaborators.

Those Swiss bankers' hands were as dirty as mine. They stole all of the money from those Jews that Hitler killed and finally settled up for a billion dollars. Hell that was just a fraction of what they'd ripped those people off for. I'd better shut up about that, they have a lot of money and could hire someone in my profession to shut me down permanently. Stacy and I and the 3 girls were sitting pretty nice here in Roswell. Ritchie and Norma and the boys were doing pretty good too. Apparently Ritchie and Norma had figured out some scam because one day right after Christmas 2004 he came showing me a bank statement that indicated that Norma and he were worth as much as Stacy and I. He said something about a Richard Pryor movie (Superman III) giving him the idea. I hadn't seen the movie and didn't understand but he said a penny here and a penny there really added up. Must have, to the tune of more than 10 billion pennies.

Have Gun Will Travel – Chapter 7 – Special Residents

One of the problems with aging is that the older you get the faster time flies. In one chapter I'd gone from being a 49-year-old bachelor to 54-year-old married man with 3 daughters. And my wealth had increased dramatically. Of course, I'd married about half of the money but my wife and I were a perfect match. I was beginning to wonder if she weren't trying to kill me off with the entire grab ass thing so she could have all of the money. Naw, once you have a lot of money, a little more becomes irrelevant. Strictly speaking more of it was hers than mine anyway. If she really wanted the money all that badly, all she had to do was ask.

I still worked out every day, but I could tell I was beginning to slow down. Nature has a way of compensating, what you lose in ability, you seem to gain in wisdom. That sort of reminded me of those 3 old geezers I'd seen in the Angeles National Forest 5 years before. They weren't very much older, when I saw them, than I was now. But, I could still put all 5 shots in the silhouette at 1,000-yards. I remembered the guy with the cane muttering something about '600-yards' with an evil grin on his face. I was curious what that was all about but wasn't about to go all the way to California to ask.

"Eat your Wheaties," Stacy said, "I've got plans for you tonight."

I popped a handful of vitamins and hoped they'd be enough. Then I took her advice and had 3 bowls of Wheaties just to stoke up on carbs. It's sort of cool to marry a woman who is 20 years younger than you are, but they can age you quickly, if you know what I mean. It would be better for a 20-year-old man to marry a 40-year-old woman. Then both of them would be near the peak of their stamina.

"So who are we going to populate this silo with?" I asked Ritchie.

"You know Bill, I've been thinking about that," he answered. "We need to look around and find a physician who's a dentist to kill 2 birds with one stone. Then we need some nurses. You could beef up your security force with a dozen or so married guys."

"I'm all in favor of that Ritchie but two things come to mind," I told him. "In the first place it's going to be pretty danged hard to find a doctor who's also a dentist. In the second place, this place is set up for sheltering people, not for them living here."

"I read an article on the Internet about a plastic surgeon in Palmdale, California who is also a dentist. The guy's name was Waugh," Ritchie said. "He can't be the only one in the country. As far as the housing goes, we have a 10-acre site. A guy sure could build a big mobile home park on 10-acres."

"But what about employment?" I asked. "Even if we hire a dual purpose doctor and a couple of nurses, plus a few more security people, we have room for almost 800 people."

“We could advertise a survival community,” Ritchie suggested. “I’ll tell you Bill, if we were looking for older people looking to retire early we’d be a lot better off. We could bill it as a combined retirement, survival community with onsite medical attention. And assuming we got mostly retired people they have their own source of incomes and we wouldn’t have to worry about them. We could keep the lot rents low and make it a closed community for members only. There are 1,001 ways to keep out the people you don’t want.”

Maybe Ritchie was right and maybe not, but a lawyer could tell us about that. I decided to go to Palmdale, California and look up this Dr. Waugh and see if he knew of anyone who might meet our needs. I told Ritchie to run the question of a closed community by our lawyer to see what his thoughts were on the matter. I explained to Stacy that I had to make a trip to Palmdale and she told me she was coming along if she could get Norma to watch the girls. I thought about that a minute and said sure, why not, I could eat more Wheaties.

Stacy and I stopped in Flagstaff the first night and stayed at the Hilton Garden Inn. The date, you should note was January 3, 2005. Nice place, fair to good restaurant, and very comfortable beds. I picked the perfect time for this trip, as Stacy was indisposed. We drove into Palmdale the next day and got a room at the Hampton Inn and Suites. I saw a Wal-Mart store across the lot and I needed some razor blades so Stacy and I walked over. I swear to God, I hadn’t expected it but there looking at batteries was that guy with the cane from 5 years before. He obviously recognized me and I was really curious about the ‘600-yards’ remark, so I walked up to him.

“My name is Bill Rogers, do you remember me?” I asked.

“About 5 years ago up at the range in the Angeles National Forest?” he asked. “My name is Gary Olsen.”

“That’s the place,” I said. “Say, I’ve been curious about something for a very long time. I heard you mutter something about 600-yards and I’ve always wondered what you were talking about.”

“I’ll make you a deal,” the guy says. “I won’t tell anyone about the Mafioso you capped and you won’t tell anyone about what I’m going to tell you.”

“I’m afraid you must have me mixed up with someone else,” I said.

“Really?” he replied coolly. “Let me show you something.”

He dug into his jacket pocket and came up with a keychain. On the keychain was a .50BMG slug.

“After I read about that shooting down in Beverly Hills, I thought about the guy we’d seen up in the mountains practicing that day,” he explained. “You picked up your brass

and targets but you didn't recover the slugs. My amigos and I drove back up there later to go shooting and I went over to the area you were using as a backstop and dug around until I came up with about a dozen slugs. They're all armor piercing, did you know that? Those were the same kind of slugs that were used on that Don."

"How dare you accuse my husband of something like that," Stacy butted in. "That Mafioso as you call him was my father."

"Lady I don't care if he was your first husband," the guy says. "In the first place it's none of my business and in the second place the ATF didn't show up at our three houses looking to bust us for having suppressors on our rifles. If I recall, you had one of those Suppressors yourself Bill."

Dang, he had me there on both counts. Either I was going to have to make friends with this guy or kill him. And from what I'd seen of those 3 guys 5 years before, they were thicker than thieves. That meant I'd either have to kill 3 guys or make friends and making friends was so much easier. Besides, I could always dust him and his 2 friends if it came down to that.

"I'm not admitting anything," I said, "But you have my word that your secret is safe with me. By the way what are your 2 friends' names?"

"Ron and Clarence. But that's all you're getting from me," he said. "You might want to make sure your secret is safe and take the three of us out. What I was referring to is Geraldo Rivera. I detest that SOB and I've been thinking about taking him out for years. I write patriot fiction under the handle of TOM and in several of my stories I talked about shooting that bastard. In one of my stories, *Preparations*, I got him at 600-yards."

"I seem to recall you were shooting out to 600-yards with that M1A of yours," I told him. "Which model of M1A was that?"

"I have a Super Match and when they came out with the Marine Corps camo stock, I bought one of them and had the rifle properly bedded," he replied. "I can almost shoot out to 700-yards now that I had the lenses replaced in my eyes," Gary said. "Cataracts, you know."

"What do you do for a living Gary?" I inquired.

"I'm disabled and so is my friend Ron. Clarence is retired," he went on.

"I have a missile silo all tricked out as a survival shelter in New Mexico," I explained. "My partner was talking about turning the area around the silo into a trailer park and opening up a survivalist type retirement community."

"Where do I sign up?" he asked.

"We haven't decided to do it or not," I told Gary. "Give me your address and if we decide to go with it, I'll have my partner send you some literature."

"Sounds fair to me," Gary said. "Well, ma'am, it was nice to meet you. Bill you take care of yourself and keep your powder dry."

That was it; the guy just walked off like he couldn't care less what he'd thought I'd done. We got those razor blades and headed back to the Hampton quickly.

"Why did you have to walk up to that guy and start a conversation?" Stacy asked.

"Honey you'd have to have been at the shooting range 5 years ago to appreciate it," I told her. "These 3 old geezers were out there with M1A rifles that had 20-round magazines and suppressors. The other two guys, Ron and Clarence, Gary just said their names were, couldn't shoot accurately much beyond 300 yards. This Gary was plunking them in at 600. He was as good at 600 as I am at 1,000. I don't think he'll be saying anything to anyone. Besides, if we open that trailer park maybe we can give them free rent just to keep an eye on them."

"You probably ought to get rid of that M82," she suggested.

"Why?" I asked. "Ritchie paid a fortune for that rifle, the scope and the suppressor. I think he told me it came to about \$40,000. No way I'm going to get rid of that gun. But, I think it might be a good idea to get it re-barreled. I'll take care of that when we get home."

"Call Ritchie and have him do it right now," she insisted.

"Ok, ok, I'm dialing," I said reaching for the phone.

"This is Ritchie," Ritchie answered.

"Do me a favor will you?" I asked.

"What do you need boss?" Ritchie asked.

"Take the M82 that I used in Los Angeles and get it re-barreled tomorrow," I told him. "Be sure you get the barrel back and then use a cutting torch on it. I don't want that barrel tied to me in any way."

"Sure boss, but what's up?" Ritchie asked.

"What's the story on the trailer park?" I asked.

"Lawyer said we can make it a closed community, no problem," Ritchie replied.

"I want you to put in 3 spots and furnish them with triplewides," I told him thinking quickly. "We have our first three clients and they are going to be on me. I'll explain when I see you."

"Ok boss, tell them to give me about 6 weeks and they can move in," Ritchie said.

"What are you doing?" Stacy asked.

"Hey honey," I told her. "How much can 3 triple wide mobile homes cost? It's cheap insurance and those 3 old geezers might just come in handy."

The next day Stacy and I met with Ralph Waugh, DDS, MD. He recommended a couple of younger doctors that we might be able to hire if I was willing to shell out the big bucks. I got the particulars and called Ritchie with the information. He told me that the rifle was in the shop and he'd had the gunsmith remove the barrel and had brought it back and cut it up. That took care of Gary and his darn slugs. Still, I was serious when I suggested that we should move the 3 old geezers to New Mexico. Hell that Gary was a pretty fair shot and they already had suppressors for their rifles. So I looked Gary Olsen up in the phone book and called him up.

"This is Bill Rogers, would it be ok if my wife Stacy and I came by," I asked nicely.

"I don't know anyone named Bill Rogers," the guy said.

"We met last night at Wal-Mart," I reminded him.

"Hang on a minute," he said.

I could hear him in the background calling to his wife, "Sharon were we at Wal-Mart last night?" and her replying, "Yes, dear."

"She says we were there last night so I suppose I met you," he said. "I have problems with my short-term memory. What did we talk about?"

"Shooting in Angeles National Forest," I reminded him.

"Oh yeah," he said, "You're the guy with that good looking redhead. I thought we had settled everything last night."

"I have an offer I like to make concerning our new trailer park," I told him.

"Yeah," he says, "36D-24-34"

This guy wasn't a legman that was sure. "36D-24-35½," I corrected.

"Sure come on over," he told me.

“The phonebook doesn’t list your address,” I remarked.

“4560 Moonraker Road,” he laughed, “Obviously you’re not a fan of my fiction.”

“About a ½ hour?” I suggested.

“We’ll put the coffee on,” he replied and hung up.

I just about had this guy figured out. He was one of those guys who could never remember a name or forget a chest. I was tempted to leave Stacy at the Hampton Inn, but when I told her about what he’d said, she laughed and said, “Well 2 out of 3 isn’t bad.” Personally, I have preferred punching his lights out.

Have Gun Will Travel – Chapter 8 – A Flurry of New People

We found a small housing tract on the east side of town. We drove in and came to a corner where we had to turn left. About 3 doors down on the right side the curb was marked '4560'. We got out and walked up to the door. I rang the bell and an older woman answered.

"Are you Bill?" she asked.

"Yes, and this is my wife Stacy," I replied.

She gave Stacy the once over and smiled inwardly, I could tell. She led us to the kitchen and told us to take a seat and she'd get Gary. About that time Gary came padding down the hall and grabbed a chair. He looked briefly at Stacy's face, said "Hi" and turned to me.

"What's this offer you were talking about?" he asked right to the point.

"If you and your friends want to move to New Mexico, I'd be willing to put you up in new triplewides, rent free," I explained.

"What's the catch?" he asked.

"No catch at all Mr. Olsen, I assure you," I told him.

"I remember you now," he said. "Want to keep an eye on us, huh?"

"Can you blame me?" I asked.

"I told you that was all settled last night," he replied.

"You say you write Patriot Fiction?" I asked.

"That's right."

"Is that like the survivalist sort of thing?" I asked.

"Yeah, nukes, plagues, earthquakes, volcanoes, abrupt weather changes, you know the drill," he replied.

"I have an Atlas-F missile silo just outside of Roswell, New Mexico," I explained. "It's fixed up to house about 780 people and we're going to put in a retirement community and provide shelter if necessary. We have food, weapons and everything everyone would need for a 2-year period."

"Really? Sharon, do you feel like moving?" he asked.

"I always told you that I'd go wherever you go, Gary," she replied.

I'm going to have to tell you that her tone said something entirely different. But, that was none of my business.

"What about my kids?" he asked. I could see her brighten appreciably.

"Tell me about them," I suggested.

"My oldest daughter lives with a guy who works as a locksmith in North Hollywood," he started. "My other daughter goes to college at the Bakersfield campus at AV College."

I looked at Stacy to bail me out, but she just smiled, as if to say, "You made your bed lie in it."

"Do any of your kids know anything about computers?" I asked.

"Hell yes," he said, "I taught them myself."

"I could give them jobs as computer operators," I said thinking quickly. "And the job would include housing."

"David and Lorrie have 4 grown boys," he offered up next.

"Still in school?" I asked.

"Sharon?" he looked for assistance.

"One's out of high school, the twins are seniors and the youngest is a junior," she explained.

"I can give the oldest boy a job as a security man and the same for the others when they graduate," I offered. "They can go to school in Roswell. There is a Junior College, Eastern New Mexico University-Roswell in town. The college confers certificates, associate's degrees and certificates of occupational training in contemporary career / technical programs and general transfer academic programs. Upper division and graduate level courses are also offered through a distance education program with the main campus in Portales."

"Where is Portales?" he asked.

"About 90 miles or so up US 70 to the northeast," I replied. "But they have a distant learning center and I think she could attend classes in Roswell."

"She's a junior studying in Criminal Justice," he explained.

“They have a program for that,” I assured him (they do).

“Let me get this straight,” he said. “You’re willing to provide housing for me and my kids plus Ron and Clarence at basically no charge. You’re willing to give David, Amy and Josh each a job and hire, Justin, Jesse and Jason when they finish high school, right?”

“That’s right,” I said.

“I’m all for it, but I’ll have to talk to Ron and Clarence,” he told me.

“You can reach me 24/7 at this pager number,” I said handing him a piece of paper with ‘the’ pager number on it. “That pager number will reach me anywhere in the world.”

“Figures,” he laughed. “How soon can we move?”

“About 6 weeks according to my partner,” I replied.

“Tell your partner I’ll call as soon as I talk to everyone, and thanks for the offer, you may not know it, but you’re a dream come true.”

Two days later we were back in Roswell. Ritchie pigeonholed me immediately.

“First, I talked to the doctor/dentist and he’ll be here next week to discuss the job,” Ritchie explained. “Second, I want to know all about these people you’re moving here and putting up at our expense.”

I carefully covered the entire deal with him and he sort of got a screwy look on his face.

“Look Boss, I don’t take just any computer people,” he explained. “However, you said the one guy is a locksmith, so we can put him in charge of Maintenance at a slightly higher salary. He can run a locksmith service on the side if he wants, I could care. Now that daughter who’s the college student we’ll make the receptionist. She can handle the phone and will have a ton of time to study. We’ll pay her as much as we pay him. What you do about the others and the security force is up to you, but you’re going to have to provide them with some training. We’ll have 4 triplewides and a doublewide ready in 4 weeks, a little sooner than I thought. Say what’s she studying in college?”

“Criminal Justice,” I laughed.

“It just keeps getting better and better,” he groaned.

It is absolutely amazing what you can accomplish in a very short time by spreading some money around. Inside of 3 weeks the place was all graded, supports for the mobile homes installed and the utilities in. On the advice of a mobile home dealer, the guy who sold us the 4 units I had to buy, we dug shallow holes and put in a set of risers that

almost looked like those concrete medians they were using these days. The dealer had ordered the homes and they been delivered and set up. At Ritchie's suggestion we installed solar electrical panels on the roof of each home. Each home was wired for electrical service from town and an automatic transfer switch that would switch over to our generator power in case the power went out. Our generator was also hooked into the same electrical feed and would feed power to the automatic switches in a matter of seconds.

Ritchie said we should have a second backup generator to the first so I gave him the go ahead. We also put in a new, large capacity well and a water tower plus fire hydrants. We added an extensive septic system large enough to handle every home we intended to have with a little extra capacity. The interview with the doctor/dentist went very well and Ritchie brought him aboard with a guarantee that if he couldn't generate at least \$100,000 per year clear, we'd make up the difference. His wife was a nurse so I needed a couple of security people who were married to nurses. I said onsite medical treatment, not FREE onsite medical treatment. Ritchie had also run an ad in several major papers and we had more applicants than we had spaces. We decided to interview each applicant to make sure they fit in. Veterans were given a major preference.

We topped the ground with sod after installing sprinkler systems. What a difference 4 weeks could make. This place was beginning to look like a real community. We classified it as a closed housing tract/guarded community and started to interview the applicants. The best we could come up with was a point system. You needed 100 points and no black marks before you'd be asked to join the community. Veteran: 20 points. Christian: 10 points. Jewish faith: 5 points. Muslim/Other: 0 points. Agnostic or Atheist: -10 points. Financially independent: 10 points. Public Dole (excluding Disability/Social Security): -10 points. Proficient with a firearm: 5 points. Member of the NRA: 5 points. Swearing Allegiance to the Flag: 10 points. Refusing to Swear Allegiance to the Flag: Black Mark. Support of the 2nd Amendment: 5 points. Opposed to the 2nd Amendment: Black Mark. High School Dropout: -5 points. High School Graduate: 5 points. GED: 10 points. College Student: 5 points. College Graduate: 10 points. Post Graduate work: 5 points. Employable: 10 points. Other Black Marks: objecting to our selection system; active alcoholic or addict; anti-social personality/behavior. I don't have the list handy and that is all I can remember at the moment, but you get the idea. We decided to make exceptions on a case-by-case basis but no black marks were allowed. We also granted bonus points, mostly on whim.

Gary had 85 points and Sharon had 40 making for 125. Ron had 50 points and his wife added 25; his 3 kids each added 40, giving the household a total of 195. Clarence had 40, as did his wife and his sister for a total of 120. David and Lorrie and their family totaled up to 200, but it was a large family. Amy only had 60, but we made an exception. We added her score to Lorrie and David's and divided by 2.

Ritchie and I agreed that our system might not be fair, but we owned the community and the lawyer said that as long as we used the same standards for everybody, we could do what we wanted. After we'd interviewed all of the applicants we ranked everyone by

score and sent out letters of invitation. Some declined, so we kept going down the list until we ran out of families with 100 points. We only had 15 vacant lots. As to the houses for Gary, Ron and Clarence and their families, Ritchie had gone ahead and ordered 4-bedroom triplewides and a 3-bedroom doublewide for Amy.

By my 55th birthday everyone was moved in and settled. It was the 4th of July so I told Ritchie to arrange a big bash and let everyone get better acquainted. Doing the interviews introduced us to the people, but I really wanted to get to know them. If TSHTF, we were all going to be in that hole in the ground for up to two weeks, hell, maybe more. Anyway, we supplied hamburgers and hot dogs and beverages including one keg of beer and we ended up with beer left over. Nice middle-aged group of people with a few younger folks and some grandchildren thrown in.

On July 5th, Ritchie came up with the bright idea of starting a shooting club for recreation and putting in a range. Ritchie was learning, and I gave him the thumbs up. The thing about it was the silo was just too close to town so Ritchie bought a small parcel of land out in the boonies, erected a clubhouse and set up the range there. Once he had that going well, we had a community meeting and explained all about the amenities. We had a Doctor/dentist with a clinic in the silo (not free). Everyone was assigned to a bed in the shelter according to gender. We also explained about the available rations and passed out a signup sheet for anyone who wanted to volunteer to be a cook. I told them we'd pay a nominal wage if it ever came to that.

Except for running the security operation, I was retired. As some of the people became more competent, I made one of them the Chief of Security and completely retired. The girls were just at that age where they benefit by having Daddy and Mommy around full time. We hadn't figured on having as many kids as we ended up with so Ritchie ordered up some playground equipment and had it installed in the park. Right after the tribe from Palmdale moved in and was settled, that Olsen fella came up to me and handed me a gift-wrapped box. I opened it and it contained 2 .50BMG shell casings.

"I wasn't completely candid with you when we talked," he said. "Everything I told you was true but I omitted a detail. When I dug out those slugs I also looked around to see just how well you'd policed your brass. I figured if you ever found out I had those slugs you'd re-barrel the rifle if you still had it. Pretty fancy rifle, I know I would have kept it. Anyway, you missed a couple of pieces of brass. As a show of my good faith and appreciation I'm giving you my trump card."

I checked the casings against a box of brass I'd saved from my occasional trips to a range. Even without fancy magnification it was obvious that the brass had come from my Barrett. That son-of-a-bitch had me by the short hairs the entire time. Pretty slick for an old man who could barely walk and talked like he'd had a stroke. And, I had no doubt that those 2 buddies of his knew all about those shell casings. He wanted to know did we intend to put in a stable. I told him we hadn't thought about it, but we'd check around and see how many people wanted to get horses. Ritchie handled that and the next thing you know we had a 36-stall horse barn on some adjacent property Ritchie had picked

up. Ritchie arranged for hay and feed and charged people so much a head for stabling their horses. It was strictly a do it yourself project, they had to take care of their own livestock.

Have Gun Will Travel – Chapter 9 – Lights Out

I've got to tell you about this, it was probably the funniest thing I've ever seen. Early in August the 3 old geezers go out and buy some horses, Morgan's, no less. That sort of made sense because Gary's wife and Ron and his wife were a little on the chubby side. Anyway, Ritchie tells me that they didn't bat an eye when he told them it was \$50 a month per horse and they had to feed them and clean the stalls. Plus they'd be responsible for letting them out to the pasture in the morning and bringing them in at night.

The Morgan averages between 14.1 and 15.2 hands and occasionally reaches 16 hands. It is most frequently found in the colors bay, black, brown, chestnut, gray, palomino, crème, dun and buckskin. The Morgan is easily recognized by its proud carriage, upright graceful neck, and distinctive head with expressive eyes. Deep bodied and compact, the Morgan has strongly muscled quarters. The Morgan horse has a dramatic gait with considerable action.

Morgan's can be found in all 50 states and in more than 20 foreign countries. They have changed very little. The Morgan has remained a stylish, spirited mount with conformation that lends itself well to a vast range of disciplines. Morgan versatility is widely recognized. The breed's soundness, power and stamina make it the choice of many driving enthusiasts. Morgan's comprised a large number of entries at Combined Driving and Carriage events, and was the first American breed to represent the United States in World Pairs Driving competition. Morgan's also excel in many other disciplines, including Park Saddle and Harness, English and Classic Pleasure Saddle and Driving, Western, Hunter, Jumper, Eventing, Dressage, Reining, Cutting, Endurance and Competitive Trail. They are gentle enough for lessons, 4-H and Pony Club involvement, and due to their steady, comfortable gaits, are in great demand as therapeutic riding horses. Morgan's are equally well known for their loving, kind dispositions.

The funny part came about a week later. Here are these 3 old guys and their wives on those Morgan horses with what looks to be custom saddles. They got a bedroll on the front in the style of the Calvary, budging saddlebags, Winchesters in scabbards and the guys have single action revolvers strapped on. And that Olsen guy was wearing a straw hat that must have been at the battle of the Alamo. It was old and stained and had enough hair grease in it to grease the axles on your car. I could tell he wasn't all that happy being on a horse, and his wife was laughing her fool head off at him.

"Morning folks," I called out, "Out for a morning ride?"

Olsen muttered something I didn't catch and then said, "As far as I'm concerned, the only thing a horse is good for is feeding carrots to."

"What's in the saddlebags?" I tried to change the subject.

"Them's our BOB's," Green answered. "You know, Bug Out Bags."

“Where are you bugging out to?” I asked trying to make conversation.

“Ain’t going nowhere Mr. Rogers,” Rawlings cracked. “But if’n one of these horses was to bust a leg or get bit by a snake we might get stuck somewheres.”

“Did you ever think about carrying a cell phone?” I asked.

“We got 3 cell phones here, one for each family,” Olsen said. “But what if the Russians attack while we’re out on a ride?”

“I’m sure we’d have some warning,” I tried to assure him.

“Did you see that TV movie called ‘The Day After’?” Olsen asked.

“Must have missed that one,” I told him. “What was that about?”

“Russians attacked the US and nuked the country but good,” Olsen replied. “Government knew it was coming but the people sure didn’t.”

He had a point there, those attacks on 9/11 had occurred and the 9/11 Commission had said that it was a combination of failures by the government, mostly in the intelligence field. They called for the appointment of an Intelligence Czar, among other things. Hell, they had it all wrong; it was Congress who had gutted the CIA. But, that’s another story I won’t go into. So these 3 old farts figured the Russians were coming, huh? Well my money was on China. They had all of those satellites in orbit and even the Washington Times had suggested that they’d lied about the nature of some of those satellites. I’d bet dimes to donuts that they had some secret military satellites up there disguised as civilian craft.

“Of course those Chinese have a bunch of nukes, too,” Olsen went on.

I snapped out of my reverie to listen to what he had to say.

“I always figured it would be the Chinese anyway, ‘cause Russia’s still rebuilding from the cold war,” he went on. “Then they went and launched a test missile back on Christmas Eve of 2004 and I’m not so sure anymore. You got a communications setup in that shelter of yours, Rogers?”

“No, why?” I asked.

“I’m a Ham operator but I got no radio,” he said. “You buy the radio and put in the antennas and I got the license to operate it for you.”

“I’ll keep that in mind,” I told him. “Got to go folks, have a nice ride.”

That was a nasty look Olsen gave in response to my last remark, but I let it go. The man seemed to be well educated, but maybe a little off in the head. I mentioned something about communications equipment to Ritchie only to learn that I'd been wrong. Part of the \$4 million he'd spent was to put in a complete set of Ham radios and a 'hot' SINCGARS. He told we had radios covering every frequency including the aviation bands. I told him to mention that to Olsen because Olsen had a radio license.

"Well, ok, boss," Ritchie said, "But Norma and I have licenses too. They publish the exams and it's just a little memorization work to get a Technicians license. Keep it up; and you can test all of the way to the top. We both have Amateur Extra Class Licenses."

I went to the apartment to see what Stacy was doing. Teresa would be starting Kindergarten this year and I figured they'd be trying on clothes. They weren't, the girls were watching TV and horsing around. I sat down at the kitchen table to visit with Stacy.

"Those old guys from Palmdale are something else," I told her.

"What did they do now?" she asked.

I explained about the horses and the Russians coming and about Olsen being a Ham operator. I may have mentioned that Ritchie and Norma were, too, I can't remember.

"I figured those old guys would be either a laugh a minute or a ton of trouble," Stacy chuckled. "They sort of remind me of the 3 Stooges. I took Terri into Roswell to get her school clothes yesterday. I took Mary and Ashley along and they raised such a fuss I had to buy them new outfits, too."

"It's not like we can't afford a few extra clothes," I said.

"Have you seen the prices lately?" she asked. "You'd think they were made out of gold rather than cotton or polyester."

I started to say something when the lights blinked out. The emergency lights came on automatically and sort of gave the apartment an eerie glow. I headed to the command center to see what was going on and Ritchie met me in the passage.

"Hey boss," he said, "We just lost power."

"I know, the emergency lights came on and then the generator kicked in," I replied.

"No, boss, you don't get it, I think the whole darned country lost power," Ritchie explained.

It turned out that Ritchie was both right and wrong. The whole country, as it turned out, was down, but it was more than just the power. What was it? Barely an hour before that I'd been thinking of those Chinese satellites? There was no way to confirm my theory

and nobody was in any danger so we didn't call an alert. Roswell was situated on a large pool of oil and natural gas. Southwestern Public Service Company provided local electrical service and PNM Gas Services provided natural gas. Because of the natural gas we had available, one of the requirements was that everyone used gas stoves, furnaces and hot water heaters. The homes had to be Energy Star compliant. With both generators running, we could generate 2,500kw of energy. Richie had stocked up on orifices to convert everything to propane and had buried and filled 4 30,000 gallon propane tanks.

Ritchie and I had talked about wind turbines but decided that they would be susceptible to a nuclear blast. The homes all had solar panels installed and the odds were that we'd only need to kick in one generator anyway. We'd only installed a limited number of storage batteries in the homes because we could invoke a conservation policy in an emergency. With the energy efficiency of the homes and the conservation policy, the residents of the trailer park could get by easily without us needing to run the second generator. We had to heat the command center anyway most of the time because the ambient temperature was a chilly 56°.

"Gary Olsen wants to see you," Ritchie advised.

"What does he want?" I asked.

"He just wants to know if we know what's going on," Ritchie explained.

"I'd better talk to him, I suppose," I told Ritchie. "Show him in."

"You have any idea what's going on?" he asked. "If you ask me, which you didn't, the Chinamen attacked us with some of those satellites of theirs and hit the country with an EMP blast."

"While we were visiting earlier I was thinking that the Chinese might have lied about some of those satellites of theirs," I commented.

"You know what a Faraday cage is?" Olsen asked.

"Don't have the slightest idea," I admitted.

"The Faraday cage is an electrical apparatus designed to prevent the passage of electromagnetic waves, either containing them in or excluding them from its interior space," he replied. "Our 5 homes have been retrofitted slightly so each home is a Faraday cage and everything inside is safe."

"How in the hell did you manage that?" I asked.

"Steel screening," he replied.

“Care to elaborate?” I asked.

“We put steel screening in the attics and on the outside of our homes underneath the siding,” he replied.

“When did you do that?” I asked.

“Been working on it since we moved in,” he replied. “Every day we took down some of those exterior panels, slapped on some screening and put all but one of the panels back up. Had to leave one panel off so we could have a continuous wrap.”

I hadn’t noticed, but it had been so busy with all of those homes moving in that I probably wouldn’t have noticed anything short of a fire. I had to see this one for myself.

“So, mind showing me what you did to your home?” I asked.

“Come on over, the coffee is on,” he laughed.

There was screening over all of the windows and screen doors. The wire was connected to the mesh under the exterior panels because I could see the wire that ran to the small hole drilled in the panel. Olsen took me inside, lifted up the attic access panel and handed me a flashlight. The whole attic had a layer of that material they use to make screen doors and it wasn’t the fiberglass stuff either. Sharon was sitting there watching some DVD movie on the TV, *The American President*, I think.

“A high-altitude nuclear detonation produces an immediate flux of gamma rays from the nuclear reactions within the device. These photons in turn produce high-energy free electrons by Compton scattering at altitudes between (roughly) 20 and 40 km. These electrons are then trapped in the Earth’s magnetic field, giving rise to an oscillating electric current. This current is asymmetric in general and gives rise to a rapidly rising radiated electromagnetic field called an electromagnetic pulse (EMP). Because the electrons are trapped essentially simultaneously, a very large electromagnetic source radiates coherently.

“The pulse can easily span continent-sized areas, and this radiation can affect systems on land, sea, and air. The first recorded EMP incident accompanied a high-altitude nuclear test over the South Pacific and resulted in power system failures as far away as Hawaii. A large device detonated at 400–500 km over Kansas would affect all of CONUS. The signal from such an event extends to the visual horizon as seen from the burst point.

“A major area of concern when it comes to EMP is nuclear reactors located in the US. Unfortunately, a little-known Federal dictum prohibits the NRC from requiring power plants to withstand the effects of a nuclear war. This means that, in the event of a nuclear war, many nuclear reactors’ control systems might/will be damaged by an EMP surge. In such a case, the core-cooling controls might become inoperable and a core

melt down and breaching of the containment vessel by radioactive materials into the surrounding area might well result.”

I noticed that Olsen also had surge protectors on every appliance. I asked about his major appliances and he said industrial surge protectors were installed in all of the 220-volt circuits. Which only left me how many homes with burnt out electronics? I didn't guarantee the residents I could protect them from everything, only that we had a shelter and onsite medical care plus backup power. It turned out that Ritchie had a surprise or two for me.

“Hey boss, send the security people out and find out how many folks need replacement appliances or repairs,” he suggested.

“Then what Ritchie?” I asked. “I suppose you're going to take your computer repair kit and fix everything, right?”

“Nope. I'm going to dig out all of those repair parts for those electrical appliances and get those 2 retired electricians that moved in to repair everything,” he laughed.

“What repair parts?” I asked.

“Well, I figured that if the US ever got nuked, EMP would take out a lot of electronics and electrical stuff,” he explained. “The wiring in those all homes is a natural conductor. So, I had two of my guys go around and get everyone's major appliance model numbers and stock up on the key replacement parts.”

“How did you know what to buy?” I wanted to know.

“I didn't but the supplier did so I just gave him the list and he ordered the stuff in. We've had it on hand since late July,” he still had a smirk on his face. “Beside, Bill, a lot of the electrical appliances these days have electrical cords under 30” and the appliances don't burn out. Can't help those people on TV's or radios, but I have most of the important things covered.”

Have Gun Will Travel – Chapter 10 – Lights On

Do all computer guys think like that or was it just Ritchie? He had a big supply of light bulbs on hand in case anyone needed them. Ritchie gave the two electricians free repair parts in exchange for their installing the repair parts for the other residents. He marked the parts up just enough to cover the cost of the parts for the electricians. It turned out that because he'd purchased so many parts, he'd gotten a very large discount. The residents ended up paying a lot less this way than if they had contacted a repairman. And, within a week, we had everybody up and running. During that week we fired up the silo and many used the facilities to cook their meals. Others cooked on their gas grills.

Norma was covering the communications center. During that first week all she was picking up was traffic on the SINCGARS equipment. But, I'm getting ahead of the story. While Ritchie had the people out checking on everyone's appliances, I called a meeting with the heads of each family. I explained that we had repair parts for their major appliances, if needed, and could provide them at a price well below retail. I went on to explain that we had an arrangement worked out with the two retired electricians in the park and that they'd be around and make necessary repairs. We'd bill the residents for the repairs when their lot rent came due next month so they didn't have to worry about money at the moment.

When we cashed out all of the precious metals, we took payment in cash, as in greenbacks. The corporate account was separate; remember? Anyway, we took all of that cash and socked it away. The interest rates were so low that they didn't make up for risk of having it invested and unavailable. A bundle of new \$100 bills is about 0.43" thick, give or take, and is worth \$10,000. An eight foot ceiling is 96" high and one stack of bills from floor to ceiling was \$960,000. We had about \$96 million in CASH so we had 90 8' high piles of \$100 bills, plus \$6 million in 1's, 5's, 10s and 20's. And, as we needed money, we deposited some in our personal accounts; we, as in Ritchie and me. Ritchie was into this survival stuff in a really big way.

Roswell isn't the little spot in the road it was back in '47. The population of the city was over 50,000 and the county over 60,000. It was going to be a while before they got power back on in the city and the people were getting restless. You know how these silo sites were protected, right? They had cyclone fence and barbed wire plus a gate at the entrance. Ritchie and I decided to kick up the security level one notch just in case people came down here looking to help themselves. This forced us to call another meeting and explain that the fine print in the agreement everyone had signed had made them part of our militia. Nobody seemed too surprised until we started handing out guns, ammo and surplus web gear. We mounted the Ma Deuces on the Hummers and used 6 of them to run continuous patrols and kept 6 in reserve. I knew I should have pinned Ritchie down better about what he'd spent that \$4 million on. He came dragging out some M-60's, M-249's and some LAW's.

"What gives, Ritchie?" I asked.

“Read an article titled, *A Defense Cookbook for the Logistician* at Global Security,” he explained. “It said we needed Ma Deuces, AT-4’s, hand grenades, M-60’s, SAW’s, M203’s and Claymore Mines to really be able to protect this place. It said the Ma Deuce’s were good against aircraft if we had ring mounts so I replaced the pedestal mounts. Couldn’t get any of the AT-4’s, but I got some LAW’s. Got some of those M67 frags, too.”

“Didn’t you get any non-lethal munitions?” I asked. This boy wanted to kill our neighbors.

“Got some of the M84’s and those ABC-M7A3 CS grenades,” he replied. “Plus I have some M1079 Crowd Dispersal rounds for the M203’s.”

Yeah right, Ritchie. I noticed that some of the 40mm rounds were in cases marked M406. It looked to me that we could try and scare the townspeople off or kill them if necessary. However, given the choice, I’d rather try and just get along. We didn’t have room for 50,000 people or more, but we did have an extra 1¼Mw of electrical power that we could feed into the electrical system. Here I am living in a hole with my family doing everything in my power to avoid attention and you’re handing out machine guns, hand grenades and anti-tank weapons.

“If anyone shows up, try to reason with them,” I suggested. “Better yet, why don’t you go into Roswell and see if our supplying their electrical grid with 1¼ megawatts of power would help them any.”

“Yeah ok boss, but sooner or later we’re going to have to kill someone,” Ritchie said. “If you will see to issuing the non-lethal munitions, I’ll drive into town and talk to whoever is in charge.”

I was thinking that if push came to shove, we could supply all of our generated electricity to the town rather than have the situation turn ugly. But, the best we could do was 2½Mw and I was beginning to have my doubts that that would be enough. Let me give you a little background on our electrical supplier and you’ll see what I mean.

Southwestern Public Service Company dba Xcel Energy is the fourth-largest combination electricity and natural gas Energy Company in the US. They offer a comprehensive portfolio of energy-related products and services to 3.3 million electricity customers and 1.8 million natural gas customers.

The company has regulated operations in 11 Western and Midwestern states, and revenue of \$7.9 billion annually; owns over 260,000 conductor miles of electricity transmission and distribution lines, and more than 32,000 miles of natural gas pipelines; and operates power plants that generate about 15,433 megawatts of electric power.

What they didn't tell you was that they operated 71 generating plants and were headquartered in Amarillo. The company had all kinds of security measures for its plants. A lot of good that did them, THE GRID WAS DOWN. Their major control centers are in Minneapolis, Minnesota; Golden, Colorado; and Amarillo, Texas. Energy has been a hot topic and widely discussed in New Mexico, too. The sun doesn't always shine (especially at night) and the wind isn't so windy, another reason we avoided wind turbines.

"They'll take all the power we can supply them," Ritchie said when he returned.

"What kind of energy conservation steps will they implement?" I needed to know.

"They tried to gloss that one over, boss," Ritchie announced. "In my opinion, none."

"Tell you what Ritchie, I was thinking about giving them our entire 2½Mw capacity, but if that's the attitude they have, I'd like you to go back and tell them that we can only supply 1¼Mw and that if they over draw and trip our breakers it won't be coming back on."

"You trying to get me killed, huh?" Ritchie said.

"Take the entire security force with you plus those old geezers from California," I told him.

"Yeah, like 3 tired old men will make a difference," Ritchie shook his head.

An hour later Ritchie was back. "Do you know what those old guys did?" he asked.

"I wasn't there Ritchie, tell me," I told him.

"That Olsen guy butts his nose in after I explained the deal to them and they started protesting our not restoring power if they popped the breaker," Ritchie starts up. "He looks the Mayor of the town right in the eye and asks the Mayor what his name is. So the Mayor asks why. Olsen says that if they don't want to do it our way there'll be trouble and he likes to know the name of people he kills."

"What did the Mayor say to that?" I asked.

"First he turns about 6 shades of white then the Police Chief asks if that's a threat," Ritchie continued. "So Olsen says no and everyone relaxes. As we're walking out the door, Olsen stops, turns around and says, about as plainly as can be, 'It's a promise.'"

"Give them the power and ask Olsen to come see me," I suggested to Ritchie.

"You want to talk to me?" Gary asked.

"I understand you made the Mayor a promise," I smiled.

“Darn right I did and I’ll keep it if they mess with this community,” he said. “Look, maybe I was out of line, but that Mayor was an arrogant arse.”

I could see that his heart was in the right place even if he did have a big mouth. So I cautioned him about making promises he couldn’t keep. He cocked his head to the right and sort of raised his chin. He looked over his nose at me but didn’t say a word. I looked at his eyes and they were as hard as steel. After a bit, he turned on his heel and walked out without saying another word. I’ve seen that look before. I saw it in the eyes of the fella that shot me in Europe and ended my career with the Agency, just before he pulled the trigger. I thought I was dead and apparently so did he because he didn’t shoot me a second time. But, I’ll never forget that look...

The power thing lasted about an hour. After that they overloaded the circuit and the breaker tripped. Ritchie had warned them that we wouldn’t turn it back on so I told him to shut down the generator. Maybe a half hour later I heard a disturbance at the gate and Ritchie and I got in a Hummer, Ma Deuce and all, and drove over. There were those guys from Palmdale standing there talking to the Mayor. Olsen was talking in a measured voice just to make certain that the Mayor understood every word he said. The Mayor must have pushed a button because Olsen shuddered, looked at his pals and chambered a round in his M1A. It got deathly quiet in an instant and Olsen asked, “What did you say your name was again?” The Mayor blanched and headed towards his car about as fast as I’d ever seen him move. For some reason, they never came back.

But, our natural gas was turned off and I only found out about it because someone complained that his gas grill didn’t light anymore. I checked with Ritchie and he told me he had new orifices for all of the natural gas fueled appliances and he’d dig them out and have someone install them. He mentioned that he had about 4 of those 30,000-gallon tanks of propane so we could avoid going into Roswell altogether. Ritchie never ceased to amaze me. Every time a problem popped up he had a solution. With 2½-million gallons of diesel fuel stored, and getting by on a single generator, we were good for about 4 years without power. But, we had to live in this town so I decided to go talk to the Mayor myself.

“Mayor, I’m here to see what we can work out on the power,” I told him.

“That nut you have living in that trailer park was going to kill me,” the Mayor responded.

“Somehow I think that if he wanted you dead, you’d already be dead,” I told his honor. “I think he just wanted you to back off and apparently you did. We have electrical generating capacity of 2,500Kw at the silo. I only offered half of that so as not to hurt our residents. We can implement conservation measures and get by without our generators. However, for me to ask the residents to go along with that I need some assurance that Roswell will implement conservation measures too.”

“Look, Rogers,” he said, “We have people on respirators and medical equipment and we’ve had to move everyone to the hospital just so they don’t die. We need that power.”

“You say that they’re at the hospital and are all ok?” I asked.

“That’s right,” he admitted.

“Then I don’t see how that is our problem, Your Honor,” I told him.

“We turned off your natural gas,” he said.

“And temporarily inconvenienced a few residents trying to use their gas grills,” I pointed out. “The trailer park is natural and electric except for a few backyard grills. We have 120,000 gallons of propane and the gas appliances are being converted to propane even as we speak.”

“What do you want for the power Rogers?” he asked.

“I want you to agree not to overload our system and to replace the diesel fuel we use up supplying the city power,” I answered. “You’ll only be able to accomplish that if you implement strong conservation measures. There are over 17,000 households in Roswell. We have a 2,500Kw capacity. That means that each home can only have about 147 watts. That’s not really enough to run everything so you are going to need to get people to double, triple or quadruple up.”

What I didn’t tell his honor was that he was going to have to congregate people to have enough energy to go around. If they got people in places like the high school gym and used the schools cooking facilities, they’d be using mostly gas and very little electricity. But, it wasn’t my place to tell him how to run his city. It was very legitimate, however, for me to insist that he make the best of what we could provide and not squander a precious resource. The simple fact was that we probably had more diesel fuel in those oxidizer and propellant tanks than they had in the entire city of Roswell.

Another simple fact was that it was going to be a very long time before the lights came back on. Some electrical equipment is innately EMP-resistant. This includes large electric motors, vacuum tube equipment, electrical generators, transformers, relays, and the like. These MIGHT even survive a massive surge of EMP and would likely survive if a few of the above precautions were taking in their design and deployment.

Have Gun Will Travel – Chapter 11 – What’s Wrong With This Picture?

I'm a travelin' man

I've made a lot of stops all over the world

Ricky Nelson was singing about his sex life and when I thought about traveling it always brought to mind where I'd gone and who I'd killed. I most certainly wasn't the most prolific person in my former profession. There was any number of people out there who had probably filled more contracts than I had. Admittedly, many of my contracts were rather high profile and generated greater fees, but the risk was often proportionate to the fee. Of all the contracts I'd fulfilled, the one in Georgia had been the most difficult. Thinking back, I cannot imagine why I took it. The money I guess, it was always more money.

Taking out my wife's father at the behest of my wife was a real turning point for me. We hadn't gotten married out of any desire to not be able to testify against each other, but rather out of something far more basic, love and lust. Of course she wasn't my wife when I filled the contract, but still... His Honor, the Mayor, apparently got the message because we started delivering our full 2,500Kw capacity to Roswell and they never brought the system down once. I don't really know where they got the diesel fuel, but they began to make regular deliveries. We were using just short of 25,800-gallons of diesel a week. Once a week 2 tankers pulled in and delivered refilled the tanks.

By giving the city a heads up, we were able to shut down the generators at regular intervals to service them and change the oil. I sent Ritchie back to town to hit the Mayor up for oil plus the 3 types of filters we needed. The Mayor, according to Ritchie, didn't blink an eye. The next day a truck showed up with several 55-gallon drums of oil and the filters we needed. No, that's not the right term; expected would be more correct. We had enough barrels of oil and filters to exhaust our entire inventory of fuel, all 2½-million gallons. Ritchie had also laid in a supply of repair parts in case we had to rebuild the engines or repair the alternators. We didn't have a mechanic aboard who could handle the task, but with Roswell getting all of the power, they'd have to supply one if needed.

Winter was coming on now and I was worried about the heat. If we weren't giving away all of the power, it wouldn't have been a problem. We'd really loaded those homes up and most of them were capable of producing about 15kw of energy, using 175-watt, 24-volt panels. While this exceeded the demand of most of the homes most of the time, solar panels do not produce at maximum all of the time. There is the angle of the sun to consider and the outside temperature and whether the sun even shines on a particular day.

I told you earlier that we'd limited the number of batteries in the homes. Ritchie and I now believe that to be a mistake. Those crusty old guys from California had been ahead of us on protecting against EMP and as it turned out, they were ahead of us on the number of batteries available in their homes to store electricity. And then Gary came in and told me something I hadn't considered.

“Our solar panels work, right?” he asked.

“As far as I know, yes,” I replied.

“Do you know how a solar panel is constructed?” he asked.

“I have no idea,” I admitted.

“A solar panel is essentially a big transistor for want of a better explanation,” Gary smiled. “What happens to transistors when you get an EMP?”

“They get fried, right?” I guessed.

“Yeah, that’s right, so we didn’t get no darned EMP or they’d be deader than a doornail, right?” he continued.

His logic was inescapable. And after I thought about it for maybe 30 seconds, I brightened up like a light bulb and asked, “Then what happened to the electricity?”

“I’ll be darned if I know what happened,” he laughed, “But I sure in the hell know what didn’t happen. Probably some danged conspiracy or a terrorist attack that took the grid down permanently.”

“But that doesn’t make any sense,” I said. “How else do you account for that equipment and appliances being damaged?”

“I asked one of those electricians who had to have parts replaced and who didn’t,” Gary explained. “It seems that in the homes without surge protection LIKE OURS, people only lost the equipment that was on. Ergo, it was a massive surge, not unlike an EMP in many ways, but different in others.”

“I guess that explains why some TV’s still work and other don’t,” I admitted. “But why haven’t the broadcast channels like radio and TV come back on?”

“That’s what makes me think there is a conspiracy,” he said. “To quote a line out of my favorite movie, ‘it don’t make no sense’.” (Which movie and who said it?)

“Would you and those pals of yours...” I started to say.

“They all call us The Three Amigos,” he says, “Get it right.”

“Would The Three Amigos be interested in taking a little road trip?” I asked.

“We get to kill anybody?” he asked, expectantly.

“Possibly,” I acknowledged.

“We’re your men,” he grinned from ear to ear. “When are we leaving?”

“Make it an hour and bring all of your gear,” I told him.

Gary gave a bit of a funny look, shrugged his shoulders and went to round up Ron and Clarence. An hour later I came out of the silo to see them standing there with ALL of their gear. Each man was wearing a military only Interceptor® QTV body armor with what turned out to be level 4 plates; ALICE web gear with a model 1911 swivel leather flap holster holding a M1911 and an 1860 Standard issue Civil War style holster with full flap design holding their Vaqueros; M67 grenades; their M1A’s Super Match rifles with a bag full of magazines; a M16 style rifle with M203 attached and several grenade pouches on their pistol belts; 2 canteens; PASGT Kevlar Helmets; a second bag full of loaded magazines for the M16’s; and, a Randall Fighting knife-8” model 2 “Fighting Stiletto”.

“You guys dressed up for a Halloween Party?” I asked.

“You said to bring all of your gear,” Gary gave me a mean look.

I looked closer at the pile and could see the Winchester rifle in its scabbard and a soft case that I could only presume held a shotgun.

“Look, you 3 amigos are going to have to make up your minds whether your Civil War Calvary or modern soldiers,” I chuckled.

They lost the 1860 holsters with the Vaqueros and the Winchesters.

“That’s a good start,” I laughed, “But why 2 rifles?”

“Because you can’t mount a M203 on a M1A and the M16 is a POS,” Gary said. “Besides, we have 2 sets of ALICE gear, one set up with the M16 mags and the other with the M1A mags.”

“Fine drag it all with you,” I said, “But someone is going to dust your butt while you’re trying to figure out which gun to use.”

I had talked to Ritchie about Gary’s theory. Ritchie told me that the satellites powered by solar panels had problems during the Leonid Meteor Showers not so much from physical impacts of the meteorites as from the EMP the meteorite generated when it struck the panels and burned out the electronics. Ritchie went on to say that it seemed to him that we were talking about a PN Junction in those solar panels and that an EMP damages a transistor by switching the PN Junctions to the on position permanently. In addition, Ritchie pointed out that all of that wiring for the solar panels would be a magnet for an EMP. Whatever.

Assuming Gary was right, I went ahead and joined them. After they had shed what they would agree to I started to load their gear into the Hummer. It was all I could do to keep from laughing out loud. Each of the guys had his shotgun in an identical sleeve in a camouflage pattern. They used magic markers to label the cases, Gary, Ronald and Clarence. I got to thinking what would happen if one of them grabbed the wrong case... We set off to follow the high power lines, looking for a break. Didn't find a single one and we made it almost to Amarillo.

"What do you think?" I asked anyone who would answer.

"Ain't no power lines down, that's for sure," Clarence summarized the obvious.

"Did anyone check the power distribution system in Roswell before we left?" Gary asked.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Did anyone go into town or wherever the power is distributed from and see if the switches were turned on," he rephrased the question.

I grabbed the mike to the second of the 13 SINCGARS that Ritchie had acquired and gave him a call.

"Silo 2, this is Bill," I said into the mike.

"Yeah, boss," Ritchie answered.

"Did anybody check out the power distribution system in Roswell?" I asked.

"Rog, it's deader than a doornail," Ritchie said.

"You heard the man," I told Gary.

"Hey Gar-Bear," Ron called from the back seat, "How's come you get to ride in front and Clarence and I have to ride in the back of the bus?"

"Cause I'm the youngest, butthead," Gary explained.

"I didn't know you was an butthead, Gary," Clarence picked up the banter.

"Let me rephrase that," Gary said. "Because I am the youngest, you butthead."

"Why'd you call me a butthead?" Clarence asked.

"I was talking to Ron, Clarence," Gary said.

“Who’s on first?” Ron asked.

I was beginning to understand what Stacy was getting at. Another 100 miles listening to these 3 nuts would have me answering Ron’s question. About then we came upon a major substation outside of Amarillo. The thing looked like it had been hit with an atom bomb. Almost, but I’m telling you it was a mess. I found a phone booth that still had a phone book and looked up the address for the Xcel Energy Control Center. I got the address and we headed over there to see if it had been hit too. Whatever they’d used on that substation was a firecracker compared to whatever they’d used on the distribution center.

Long story short, I pull up to the curb and asked some guy what happened to the Control Center. He says they took out all 4 of the Xcel Control Centers and some more at other utilities back east.

“How do you know what happened?” I asked.

“I was the manager of that Center until they blew it up,” he announced. “Haven’t you been listening to the news?”

“Mister we haven’t had any news in Roswell since the lights went out,” I told him.

“That’s funny, we’ve been getting regular reports on KATP,” the guy says. “I only listen to it and KACV, but it’s on the air too.”

“Ritchie, this is Bill,” I radioed. “A bunch of the Control Centers have been taken out, but the radio stations here in Amarillo are on the air.”

“AM or FM, boss?” Ritchie asked.

“Try them all,” I suggested.

“Nada, Jefe,” Ritchie replied a few minutes later.

I turned on the radio and spun the dial and hit station after station. I looked at Gary and Gary looked at Ron and Ron looked at Clarence who reached in the back and grabbed a rifle.

Have Gun Will Travel – Chapter 12 – Learning the Truth

“Put the rifle away, Clarence,” I told him. I wasn’t going to get us busted for openly displaying arms in Amarillo. At least not M16s with M203s attached. I should have let The Three Amigos bring those 1860 holsters with their Vaqueros and Winchesters.

“Pull over there,” Gary pointed to a newspaper box. He piled out of the Hummer and searched his pockets for a coin. When he didn’t find one, he gave that cover a good yank and helped himself to 4 papers, then got back in the vehicle.

“How’s about we get us a motel and catch up on the news?” he suggested. “I could use a drink.”

We found a motel with a restaurant and after dumping our things into separate rooms, headed to the restaurant to get Gary that drink. Turns out that about the only thing The Three Amigos drank was coffee, hot and black. Ron dumped enough Sweet and Low in his coffee to make my stomach hurt. We went ahead and ordered from the menu and started reading the papers. It had been nearly 10-weeks since the lights went out and most of that story was old news and wasn’t really being covered. I decided to go to the adjoining bar and see if the bartender could fill me in.

“We just got into town and see that there was a blown up substation on the west side and Xcel’s control facility looks like it was hit by a bomb,” I said ordering a longneck.

“Yep, it’s like that all over the country,” he says. Typical bartender listens but never has much to say.

“So friend, I’d be grateful if you could fill me in a little,” I said, laying a \$50 bill on the bar.

Poof. The bill was gone and his mouth was running a mile a minute.

“About 10-weeks ago, there was a massive terrorist attack around the country,” he began to explain. “There must have been a bunch of the terrorists, but nobody knows because there hasn’t been a single arrest. Anyway, they bombed power distribution facilities all the way from eastern Canada to the west coast. The grid overloaded in some places and a surge wiped out a lot of stuff. Some cities got power back up, like we did, but there’s no distribution network anymore.”

“I didn’t notice anyone working on either of those facilities,” I tossed in. “And something else I ought to mention. My friends and I are from New Mexico and we can’t get any radio news.”

“The stations had to cut back to broadcasting with only 500 watts of power,” he said. “You can get the stations just fine if you live in the city. Anyway, to continue with the story, whoever they were didn’t just stop with the electrical power. They up and destroyed a lot of the communications facilities. We’ve had people here in the bar who have local

phone service but no long distance. We've had other folks who don't have any phone service at all. The Internet is down, of course. The thing is if you don't have local power or a standby generator, you don't have any power at all."

"We heard something about EMP," I said to see what his reaction was.

"That was the first report that got out among the military until they figured out what really happened," he allowed. "Bush has all of the military cleaning up the facilities that got blown up and the Corp of Engineers is trying to rebuild some of the plants and get the electrical grid back up."

"Bush is a Texan, why hasn't Amarillo been cleaned up and everything restored?" I asked.

"Those terrorists, or whoever it was, used some of those missing Russian nukes on the east coast, that's why," he explained. "They're having a hell of a time cleaning it up."

"You get national news here?" I asked.

"Naw, just pick stuff up here and there from folks passing through," he explained. "You boys stop by the Sheriff's office and pick up travel permits, did you?"

"Travel permits? What travel permits?" I asked.

"I take it that means you didn't," he chuckled. "The Department of Homeland Security and FEMA got Bush to issue an Executive Order. I think they're trying to use it to catch the terrorists. Anyway, to travel more than 50 miles from home, you need a travel permit."

"We don't have any because Roswell is so cut off that we have no idea over there what's going on," I explained.

"Well, you boys stop by the Sheriff's Office and pick up a permit," he suggested. "They make allowances for people from out-of-town, so you won't have any trouble. Just show them your driver's license and state your business and they'll give you a permit for wherever you're going to. You want another long neck?"

"No thanks," I said and laid a five on the counter, "I think my lunch is ready."

"Find out anything?" Ron asked when I returned to the table.

"Lots," I said. "Let's eat up and get to one of the rooms and I'll fill you in."

We finished our lunch and The Three Amigos got large Styrofoam containers of coffee to go. We gathered in my room and I told them everything the bartender had said.

“Now that figures,” Gary said when I’d finished. “I wonder how many pockets there are around the country that are blacked out?”

“He didn’t say and I didn’t think to ask,” I said. “I suppose we’d better go to the Sheriff’s office and get those travel permits.”

“Bull,” Ron exploded. “I don’t need anybody’s permission to travel around this county, it’s the USA.”

“He’s right, partner,” Gary said. “We have to keep a low profile until we get more information. Why don’t we all get cleaned up and take a cab to the Sheriff’s office?”

I thought about that and Gary had a point. If they got one look at the contents of the Hummer we’d be in deep doo-doo. That Ma Deuce was under a canvas in the back together with 2,000 rounds of ammo. Then, there were all of those military weapons, with suppressors yet! We all had concealed weapons permits, but I had no idea whether they would be honored during the present crisis with DHS/FEMA running the show. Besides, the Sheriff’s office might have more information. So we cleaned up and about 2 hours later we taking our turns getting the permits.

“What’s your business in Amarillo?” the Deputy asked.

“Deputy, we’re from Roswell and the city has been cut off for 10-weeks,” I explained. “We came to find out what happened to the electricity and phones.”

“The 4 of you together?” he asked.

“Yes. Give him your driver’s licenses fellas,” I suggested to The Three Amigos.

“I’ll give you 96-hour permits,” he says. “You boys can check at the information office we have set up and get a copy of the new Travel Rules and find out all that we know about what’s going on.”

Hell, they didn’t know anything, that bartender had been a better source of information. But, we picked up a copy of the Travel Rules and took a cab back to the motel. Here we were 215 miles from home with 96-hour Travel Permits and very little information to go on. Ron said he was hungry so we headed to the restaurant. I noticed a different bartender behind the bar so I told the fellas I’d go pump him a little. I ordered a long neck and fished out another fifty and a five. I paid for the beer and told him to keep the change. Then I laid the fifty on the bar and suggested that he fill me in. He didn’t know a whole lot more than the first bartender; I could have saved myself fifty bucks. Wanted to know did we have travel permits and I told him yes. He almost seemed disappointed.

The gist of it was that parties unknown had attacked the US from within. On the east coast, the attackers had employed several nuclear weapons and apparently there was a lot of contamination to be cleaned up. Since Amarillo hadn’t been the victim of one of

those nukes, the city was near the bottom of the list as far as federal cleanup went. The locals were starting the cleanup soon but they could only clean up, there was a dearth of repair parts. There must be a shortage of food, too because I had to make 4 selections from the menu before I could order something that they had.

“I think maybe we’d better head back home fellas,” I suggested. “I didn’t learn a whole lot more and I think it might be a while before they restore power and communications.”

“I thought you said we might get to kill somebody,” Gary replied.

“Somehow, Gary, I suspect that this is only the beginning,” I responded. “Who knows, before this is over, you might get to shoot the Mayor.”

“That SOB,” Gary smiled. “He isn’t worth a bullet; I’m going to use my knife.”

We spent the night in Amarillo and early the next morning headed back to Roswell. I got Norma on the radio and told her we were inbound and should be there in about 4-5 hours. She informed me that both Gary and Ron had visitors waiting for them when they got home. Someone, probably military, came on the SINCGARS and wanted to know who we were and what we were doing on these frequencies. The idiot wasn’t thinking or he’d have realized that we were using military radios. Or, maybe he was and was just playing dumb.

We arrived back in Roswell before noon and I went to see Stacy and the girls and left The Three Amigos on their own.

“Find out anything?” Stacy asked.

“Terrorists or somebody brought down the electrical grid for the country and took out a lot of control centers,” I explained. “They used tactical nukes on the east coast. Whoever did it took out communications as well. I think that we’re going to be on our own for quite a while.”

“How did the fellas from California work out?” she asked.

“We didn’t get into any trouble so I didn’t find out,” I told her. “But you were right about one thing, honey. They’re a combination of the 3 Stooges, and Abbott and Costello. It got to the point on the way to Amarillo, where we ended up by the way, that I was about to join in with the ‘Who’s on First’ routine.”

All of the birds were returning to the roost. Damon was there with his 3 kids and Derek and Mary had shown up with DJ, Elizabeth and Josh. Over at Ron and Linda’s, they had a similar situation. Jennifer was there with her husband and two kids and Paula and Mark had arrived from Austin, MN. Plus at Clarence and Lucy’s their children had pulled in. Gary went to see Ritchie and reminded him that the deal was housing for all of their families. There were 15 empty doublewides sitting so Ritchie took it upon himself to as-

sign each of them to one of the empty homes. The number of empty homes went from 15 to 8 in a matter of minutes. (2+2+3) Later that afternoon I went to see The Three Amigos and meet their families. Ritchie had told me what he'd done and I told him that that was ok, I'd given my word. I also told him to stay off the SINCGARS and just monitor the frequencies. Finally, I told him to quietly slip the alert status from blue to yellow and I'd explain later.

"This is my son Damon and his kids are named Britney, Aaron and Eric," Gary said. "The other one is my son Derek, his wife Mary and their kids, Derek, Elizabeth and Joshua. I really appreciate Ritchie assigning them houses, Bill."

"What are the backgrounds?" I asked. "Part of the deal was my finding them employment."

"Damon is an electronics technician trained by the Navy," Gary said. "Derek and Mary met in the Army. He drove a tank and she hauled his tank around on a transporter. Damon was also an over-the-road trucker for a while."

"I'd appreciate it if Damon would get with Ritchie and check out the communications gear," I suggested. "Derek how about you take over the job as Assistant Director of Security?"

"I can if you need me Mr. Rogers, but I'm a whiz on inventory management," Derek replied.

"Derek, Ritchie's wife Norma has the inventory all computerized, so you can check with her," I suggested, "But with your military background I'd really like you on the security team."

"You got a doctor here?" Damon asked. "I'm out of my meds and I'm bipolar."

"Damon, we have a doctor with a clinic in the silo," I told him. "He probably has what you need. I've still got to meet Ron's kids and Clarence's kids so I'll see you folks later. Gary, could you meet me in the command center in about an hour?"

"I'll be there," he replied.

Paula was a teacher and I discussed her getting a school running. Mark was in marketing and I assigned him to the security force. Jennifer ran a day care so I told her to check with Stacy and her husband was a mechanic and I put him on maintenance. Clarence's boys all ended up on the security force. Each of the families that had just been added had something to contribute to the community and I was thankful for that. I had a feeling that things were going to get a whole lot worse before they got better. I didn't know at the time what a gift I had for understatement. I also asked Ron and Clarence to meet with me in the command center.

Have Gun Will Travel – Chapter 13 – Painful Lessons

We hadn't been back 3 days before the folks in Roswell finally overloaded the circuits and brought down the generators. We had to pull the alternators and take them to town to be repaired. The engines were ok, just a little tired. After we got the alternators back, installed and checked out, Ritchie, The Three Amigos and I went to see the Mayor.

"Your Honor," I said, "Let me bring you up to speed. The United States has suffered a massive attack from within. Electrical facilities all over the country have been taken out and on the east coast whoever did it used nukes. They also took out the communications network. Here is a copy of the Travel Rules that FEMA/DHS have implemented pursuant an Executive Order issued by Bush. We went to Amarillo and they have electricity but are short of food. You shouldn't expect the power to come on anytime soon. What have you done to locate alternative sources of power?"

"Nothing, we have your power," he said.

"Had our power," I replied. "You overloaded our generators and took out both of the alternators, requiring us to use our only set of parts (a lie) to make repairs. I'm sorry, but you broke the Agreement, and won't be getting any more power from us."

"Then we'll just come and take it," he said.

Kaboom!!!

Gary had gone back on what he'd said and wasted a bullet after all. He swung the Vaquero towards the door just as the Chief of Police came rushing in. The Chief took one look at the Mayor and a second at Gary and the massive .45. Gary had him cold so he didn't reach for his gun.

"Self-defense, Chief," Gary said. "The Mayor declared war on us."

"That's right, Chief," Ron added, "Bill here told him he was going to have to cutoff power to Roswell and the Mayor said that you folks were going to come and take it."

"You're under arrest Olsen," the Chief said.

Kaboom!!!

"Screw it, they can only hang you once," Gary said holstering the gun.

We stepped over the body of the Chief and headed back for the silo. The minute I got there I told Ritchie to put us on Red Alert. It was at this point that I learned what my partner had been doing with all of the income from the business. The only remaining recoilless rifle remaining in service with the US military was the M3 Carl Gustaf Rifle. This particular weapon was manufactured by Bofors Weapons Systems of Sweden and was

used by military units around the world. The models we had were Canadian. A quick review of our inventory of projectiles revealed FFV441, HE Shrapnel rounds, useful in a "lobbed" trajectory to 1,000m, which can be fused to fire on impact or airburst; FFV502 dual-use HEDP rounds; FFV551 primary HEAT rounds, with a range of about 700m, effective against moving targets at up to 400m; and, FFV545 illuminating starshells. They were supplemental to our LAW's.

Ritchie hadn't bought any cannons or tanks, but he did have three Mk-19's that could use the ring mounts for the Hummers. I suppose our little militia could be best described as a heavy infantry unit. As for size, I suppose we could field maybe two scant companies. By my calculations that put a hair over 400 of us up against the entire population of Roswell. Maybe some of the wives would join in, especially the younger ones like Gary's daughter-in-law who was ex-Army. We were probably better armed than they were unless they got to a military base and helped themselves to some weapons, that is. Regardless, I'd tried it the easy way and that greedy Mayor just didn't know when to quit. I'd told, what did they call him, Gar-Bear, that he might get to take out the Mayor and obviously he'd seen to it that he got the chance.

One of these days I was going to have to talk to Ritchie and find out where he got so many illegal arms. But, I had a sneaking suspicion that I already knew. What the expression? Money talks and BS walks? Even in a country like ours, the proper amount of money applied in the right places can oil the hinges and open a lot of doors. Most folks know this instinctively but they don't know who to talk to or have the funds to make it happen. You take those 3 old guys from California for example. They must have some sort of inside contact because according to them, those M1A's of theirs didn't start out or end up as being California legal. And, they had their own M16A3's and you absolutely couldn't buy those on the street. Neither could you buy M203's or the 40mm grenades, but they had all of those and more.

Gary had mentioned on the way back to Roswell from Amarillo that they spent more for their ammo than the typical guy and bought Black Hills ammo for some of their guns. Maybe so, but the last time I looked, Black Hills didn't sell 40mm grenades new or reloaded. He talked about the shotguns and how much he detested the tactical loads even though that was all he used. The low recoil, he said, gave them a faster recovery time and the 2¾" shells meant another round or so. They alternated slugs and the 8-pellet 00 buck in the shotguns. The cartridges in the rifle cartridge belt were the 325 grain +P cartridges put out by Buffalo Bore and the cartridges in the gun belts were Winchester Silver Tips. He said he didn't know if the Vaquero could handle the Buffalo Bore rounds or not and he didn't want to lose a hand finding out.

He went on to say that he'd always wanted one of those Barrett rifles but they were not only illegal in California but also so expensive that he'd never been able to afford one. He referred to that rifle I had and said it was really quite something. He'd seen, he said, pictures of the rifle with the Reflex suppressor mounted but had never handled one. He asked about the recoil and I explained that the suppressor reduced it to the point that the rifle wasn't unpleasant to shoot. He responded that it was pretty loud for a sup-

pressed weapon and I reminded him that I'd been shooting hand loaded .50BMG match grade rounds to guarantee the accuracy I was getting. He asked about the spring behind the suppressor and I explained that it helped to reduce the recoil even further.

When Olsen didn't have up a head of steam, he was a pretty nice fellow. He explained to me that he had what some referred to as a German temper, saying that he was slow to rile but when he went off it was explosive. That Mayor had gotten his goat and it made Gary angry just to think about him. I'd certainly agree with that. When we went into the Mayor's office, I told everyone to keep their cool. The Mayor had opened his mouth and claimed a right to something that wasn't his and then he'd said he'd take it away from us. I was thinking that this would be one funeral we'd skip.

Ritchie got the weapons all reissued and I put Gary's boy Derek in charge of one company and the Security Chief in charge of the other. Each company had 20 10-person squads plus squad leaders and platoon leaders. We didn't bother with the typical military arrangement of having officers and enlisted. In the first place we didn't have enough people and in the second place the NCOs' ran the military anyway, for the most part. We just designated people to make decisions at the squad and platoon levels and let Derek and Al make the decision at the company level. Al Davis was now in charge of the security force. He was a retired 30-year Marine Noncom with a chest full of ribbons. Gary mentioned that his boy had 4 rows of ribbons, which wasn't bad for an E-5 in the Guard. His boy had done a tour in Korea and one in Kosovo. I could have done worse.

We pulled Ma Deuces off 2 of the Hummers and mounted the Mk-19's. That gave each company 5 Hummers with a heavy machine gun and one with an automatic grenade launcher. We set the other Mk-19 and 2 Ma Deuces up on tripod mounts to guard the entrance to the silo complex. Being we were at our highest security level, Stacy suggested that we get all of the ladies who weren't fighting into the shelter with the younger children. She said she'd get Ron's girls Paula and Jennifer to help her with that and that she'd see to it that the kitchens were fired up and hot meals prepared. None of the women who had signed up as kitchen staff were part of our militia.

We had enough SAW's to issue one per squad and enough M-60's to do the same. 4 rifles in each squad carried the M203 grenade launchers. To a man, the squad leaders wanted an M1A rifle so there was one of them, minimum, per squad. About 1/2 of the riflemen who didn't have the M203 wanted the M1A rifles so we obliged. That gave us 2 machine guns, 3 MBR's, 4 grenadiers and 2 backup riflemen to the squad. We assigned the fellas with the plain M16's to carry ammo for the machine gunners. Not a bad tactical setup. Each of the 12 Hummers had a driver and a gunner, every last one of them a woman. I'm not a sexist and I don't want anyone getting that idea. But I've seen the way some women drive and frankly some of them are better than men. The few extra people we had manned the machineguns and the Mk-19 by the silo entrance or were issued an M16A3/M203 combo.

Al, Derek and I decided that we'd have one company on duty at a time in 12-hour shifts. I know that it would probably have been better to run 4-hour shifts, but that made for too

much moving of people around. We set up some of those camping privacy screens as latrines and brought the people on duty hot meals twice during their shift. Usually when you got drafted during a war, your term of duty was the duration plus 6 months. In this man's army your term of duty was only the duration, or until you died of old age, whichever came first.

"You know honey, on the way back from Amarillo, Olsen and I were talking," I told Stacy. "He sure fancies that Barrett Rifle of mine."

"He's a crippled up old man, could he handle a rifle that weighs that much?" she asked.

"It might be interesting to find out," I answered. "He's a pretty fair shot."

"It's your rifle so do what you want," she said. "And, if lugging it around gives him a heart attack you can always reclaim it."

It took the people of Roswell about 3 days to screw up the courage to attack us. It happened just after a shift change, so I'm guessing 2am. They came sneaking in and surrounded the site. Say, before I continue, do you remember the article that Ritchie said he read at Global Security? *A Defense Cookbook for the Logistician* recommended the M-18 Claymore mine and by now you should know Ritchie. The mines were planted right up near the cyclone fence, on the outside of course. There were hastily dug fighting positions and from these fighting positions a man could discharge 3 different Claymores. The Claymore came with a 100' spool of firing wire so we had the guy 50' back of the fence in a fighting position (foxhole) directly behind one Claymore. The other two Claymores were 100' from the foxhole putting the mines about 80' apart. And we had enough of the M-18's to ring the place multiple times, if necessary.

Our plot was roughly square meaning that the perimeter of the area was only about 2,640 feet. We had a mine on each corner pointed to cover both sides plus 8 mines on each side for a total of 38. Make that about 5 times, Ritchie had 200 of the Claymores. Anyway, the townspeople started out by firing at us from the dark. We had good light discipline and they couldn't really see anything unless they had night vision. I'm sure some of them did because a few of my people who didn't happen to be in a fighting position when the firing started went down. Someone with one of those Gustaf's popped a star shell lighting up the area.

By now all of my people were in their fighting positions and the star shell only exposed the positions of the townspeople. Nobody needed to give the command to fire or to tell the people when to touch off those Claymores. You do recall that we gave a pretty good veteran's preference, right? I'll tell you one thing; never during either of my tours in Nam did I see Charlie behave as stupidly as those townspeople. Never. The company that had just gone off duty an hour or so before had routed out and was looking for opportunities to make it to the extra fighting holes we'd dug. Hell that was easy, the townspeople didn't have any machine guns, grenade launchers and such and they were eating dirt trying to avoid getting killed.

As soon as the star shell began to peter out the second company made a rush for their foxholes and nearly every one of them made it. When it was evident that all of my people were secure another star shell popped up catching some of the townspeople, who had taken advantage of the darkness and moved in a little closer, off guard. Some of them were within the lethal range of the mines and a few of the mines were detonated, cutting them down like wheat. With machine guns firing at them and grenades being lobbed and now the mines, it became too much for the attackers and they began to pull back. We had about enough ammo to fight WW III so we kept up fire until there weren't any more good targets.

We quickly moved the wounded to the silo complex and left the dead lay where they fell until we had the morning light. The townspeople did not come back after sunup to retrieve the dead and wounded so I sent people outside our perimeter to check them out. We hauled their wounded a ways off so they could recover them and treat them without fear of our firing on them and hauled their dead and stacked them like so much cordwood. We didn't take a count of their dead and injured, this wasn't Nam and we didn't have any politician to please with some inflated numbers that didn't mean anything anyway. They lost a bunch dead and a fair number wounded. They'd have had fewer dead if they'd have raised a white flag and recovered them, but for whatever reason they didn't.

In the morning after we'd gathered our dead and laid them to rest in some quickly dug graves, Gar-Bear went to his house and came out with a red flag. He lowered the Stars and Stripes and added the red flag below it. I walked over to Ron and asked him what the red flag was all about.

"Bill it could be one of two things, but they both mean the same," Ron said. "In the early days of the so-called 'Golden Age of Piracy' (mid-to-late 1500's), pirates (especially French boucaniers, or buccaneers) kept two battle flags, one plain red and one plain black. Before a battle, the captain would hoist one or the other to show whether quarter was being given (for the non-English speakers, this is an archaic expression meaning whether or not prisoners would be taken). The red flag meant 'no quarter' (no prisoners, slaughter every one of the enemy). In San Antonio when Santa Anna arrived he raised a red flag warning the defenders that no quarter would be given. Either way, I think my friend Gary is telling those townspeople that if it's up to him, he'll kill each and every one."

I went into the complex and located that Barrett rifle and the magazines and ammo. I got Ritchie to help me carry the things and we took them topside and I gave them to Gary. He just stood there holding the rifle with his mouth open staring. After a minute he got a big grin on his face and said, "For me? Gee, thanks." I showed him how to operate the weapon and helped him load the magazines; I think Stacy was wrong; it was going to be a long time before I got that rifle back, if ever.

What I did instead was buy him a McMillan Brothers Tac-50 with the Nightforce NXS 12-42x56mm scope and night vision rail, 8 extra magazines plus a MUNS and Jet suppressor for about 25 grand. Richie already had a large supply of Mk 211 and M1022 so I bought him 10 cases of Hornady 750gr A-MAX match ammo.

Have Gun Will Travel – Chapter 14 – Information Blackout

It was getting down in the fall and the trees were shedding their leaves and there was a definite chill in the air. The lights had gone out on Sunday August 14, 2005. We'd gone to Amarillo the week before Thanksgiving and Gary had shot the Mayor the Tuesday before Thanksgiving and we were attacked on the day after Thanksgiving. Officially, winter was still a month away but it looked like it might snow. Apparently Amarillo was still under power restrictions or we'd have picked up one of their radio stations by now. This whole situation stunk to high Heaven. One would have thought that somewhere someone would have a radio station on the air that was putting out more than 500 watts.

AM propagation characteristics vary drastically between day and night, resulting in two completely different allocation schemes (and, consequently, different daytime and nighttime facilities for most AM stations). During daytime hours, AM signals propagate principally via currents conducted through the earth, called groundwave propagation. Useful groundwave signals have a range of only about 200 miles for the most powerful AM stations, and less than 50 miles for many stations. After sunset, changes in the upper atmosphere cause the reflection of AM signals back to earth, resulting in the transmission of skywave signals over paths that may extend thousands of miles. Nighttime skywave propagation results in a much greater potential for inter-station interference. With the exception of powerful clear channel stations and relatively low-power local stations, many AM stations are required to cease operation at sunset. Most of those that remain on the air at night must reduce power or use directional antenna systems, or both.

That's the whys and wherefores of AM radio transmission and signal strength. Ritchie gave the information to me and he told me where he got the information way back when. The townspeople hadn't been back, but today was only Tuesday, November 29, 2005. I imagined that they'd be back. However because it was getting downright chilly outside, we talked it over and decided to only maintain a platoon and 2 Hummers on duty at all times. Turns out we had some night vision of our own and we equipped the nighttime platoon with the binoculars. We had 8 platoons so the folks only had to pull a 12-hour shift every 4 days. Stacy suggested that we let everyone go back to their homes but to pass out the extra firearms so that everyone old enough to use a gun had one to use.

The problem with that, of course, was some of those people had never fired a gun before and the range was down the road a ways. Al suggested that we send a second platoon to guard the people that were learning to shoot and the guards could help with the instruction. It would take several days to get everyone to the point where I'd feel safe being around him or her when he or she had a gun in his or her hand, but if that's what it took to be secure, so be it. I went with the group one morning out of curiosity. The people who had never fired a gun in their lives turned out to be easier to teach than those who'd fired guns but never had any training.

When I got back and head for our apartment, who should I run into coming out of our apartment but Gary Olsen, with a smile on his face that went from ear to ear. He said good afternoon slapped me on the back and went on his way. Now I'm not a jealous man, but I'll have to admit that I was really curious now. I went in and poured some coffee, another bad habit I'd picked up from The Three Amigos, and sat down at the table. Stacy was loading the dishwasher and I asked her what Olsen had wanted.

"Nothing, just a little information," Stacy said.

"What kind of information and why didn't he ask me?" I inquired further.

"It was nothing important and I guess you weren't around, honey," she said dismissing me.

It wasn't important until she said it wasn't important and now it was very important. I got up and headed to Olsen's house to find out what the story was. I knocked on the door, perhaps just a trifle too strong and Sharon answered the door.

"Gary here?" I asked.

"Sure, come in," she said. "GARY, BILL'S HERE."

"Coffee?" she asked.

"Just had a cup, thanks I'll pass," I responded.

"I was just coming to see you Bill," Gary said. "Could Ron, Clarence and I have permission to leave for a few days?"

I hadn't expected that. He was running for his life and taking his pals with him.

"I suppose, where are you headed?" I asked.

"Burbank," he replied pouring a cup of coffee and sitting down.

"What's in Burbank?" I was sort of curious now.

"A store where I can get a rather unique one of a kind gift for a friend of mine," he said.

"Did Stacy give you the information you wanted?" I asked.

Sharon looked at Gary in a most peculiar way.

"As a matter of fact she did," he said, "Told me exactly what I needed to know."

"How about I ride along and keep you company," I offered.

“Thanks for the offer, but we’ll be all right,” he said. “If it’s ok with you, we’ll leave tomorrow and try to be back in about 4 or 5 days.”

“Well, ok,” I said, “I’ll see you when you’re (if you ever come) back.”

The next morning Gary’s vehicle was gone when I came out of the silo to have a look around. I decided that it was time for a cup of coffee and went to his house and knocked on the door. Sharon answered and invited me in. I went into the kitchen and sat down at the table. When she asked if I wanted coffee, I said yes and she poured me a cup and sat down at the table with me.

“They left very early this morning, Bill, maybe around five,” she said.

“Headed to Burbank?” I asked.

“There and to Palmdale,” she said, “The fellas know a gal named Sandy in Palmdale who can cut a few corners for them.”

“Do you know what they went to California to buy?” I asked.

“Yes,” she said.

“Are you going to tell me?” I asked after a minute of dead silence.

“No,” she said. “Would you like some more coffee?”

“Well do you know what kind of information that he got from Stacy?” I asked.

“Yes,” she said.

“Are you going to tell me?” I asked after another minute of dead silence.

“Not that either,” she replied.

“Well, I’ve got to run,” I told her, “Thanks for the coffee Sharon. I can find my way out.”

I went to my office and was sitting there watching the security cameras Ritchie had installed outside of the silo when Ritchie walked in.

“They’re back,” he said.

“They only left at 5 am according to Sharon,” I said.

Ritchie chuckled. “Boss I was talking about the townspeople, not The Three Amigos.”

“Are they attacking?” I asked.

“The townspeople or The Three Amigos?” he asked.

“Yes,” I replied, two can play this game.

“Nope,” he said and walked over to his desk and sat down.

“Where did they go?” I asked.

“The Three Amigos went to Burbank and Palmdale and I don’t know where the townspeople went only that they’re back,” Ritchie explained.

I was starting to get a little tired of this game. “Look Ritchie, I could care less about The Three Amigos. Tell me about the townspeople.”

“Oh, they brought in 3 semi flatbeds loaded with large generators,” Ritchie replied.

“They’re the Cumming Diesel units on one, but I couldn’t see what size they were except that they’re bigger than ours. We have the model DFCL and I think they came back with several of the model DQLA’s. They have about twice the capacity of our units. The other semi had some generators I recognized. Television station KSWS has it’s studios in Lubbock, but it’s transmitter is about 8 miles west of Caprock. That’s about 40-50 miles east of here. They have, make that had, not one but TWO big huge diesel generators to run that 50 KW RF transmitter for when the ice takes down the power lines. I’ve seen these rascals and they are monsters and they get run-up every week to make sure that they stay in shape. I don’t know how they managed, but they stole those 2 generators from that TV transmitter and loaded them each on a truck and hauled them back.”

“They could have gone after those generators instead of attacking us Ritchie,” I observed.

“You know Bill, some people are just too lazy to do things the right way,” Ritchie replied. “If they can steal a generator a few miles away, why go a long way off? We were what they took to be a known commodity. It wasn’t until they attacked that they found out that they didn’t know as much as they thought. That Mayor of theirs got them started in the wrong direction. It’s a real shame that townspeople got killed, but they killed some of ours.”

“I really wasn’t all that much into this preparedness thing when we started,” I admitted, “But I can see now that it was the right thing to do. I stayed out of that fight because I’ve had enough of killing. I’m not saying that I wouldn’t if I had to, but I really have had enough.”

I was hoping that we had seen the end of the people from Roswell, but a few days later a committee made up of members of the city government came to call. I had no expectations concerning what they wanted but agreed to meet with them. I was afraid that

they come to insist on Gary Olsen's arrest and demand some sort of redress over the number of townspeople killed. The Three Amigos were running late and hadn't returned from California at the time the committee showed up.

"Can I help you?" I asked. There were 4 men and one woman, who I recognized as the city council elected on March 2, 2004.

"We came to talk to you about 2 things, the death of the Mayor and Police Chief and the shooting that occurred the other day," one of the men said.

"I'm listening," I replied. Better not to give them too much wiggle room until I heard them out.

"The Mayor was wrong to handle the situation the way he did," one of them said.

"I guess so, he declared war on us and it got him killed," I replied.

"We heard that the Chief of Police and he were in on it together," another offered.

"I wouldn't know about that," I replied.

"Anyway, there's no arrest warrant for Olsen," a third one said.

"I'll tell him when I see him," I offered.

"Now, about the attack. We could have come to you and tried to work something out. But some members of the community wanted to take things into their own hands. We were opposed to it, but there are only five of us and tempers were pretty aroused. All of the people who started it ended up dead or dying later, plus a few who got sucked into the deal. We've come to see what the City of Roswell can do to compensate those members of your trailer park who were killed or injured. We really would like to avoid a bunch of lawsuits."

"I'll give you a list of the names of the people who were killed and injured and you can discuss this with the families of those killed or the injured people themselves," I suggested.

"You wouldn't have a word with them on our behalf?" the lady inquired.

"I wasn't involved in that fight personally and I really don't believe that I can speak for the people," I responded to her. "I'm willing to advise them to discuss the matter with you before bringing their lawsuits, however."

"Please have them contact the City Hall and arrange to meet with us," a man said, "I'm sure we can work something out. Thank you for your time, Mr. Rogers, we'll be leaving now."

The city council had no more than left than The Three Amigos pulled in. It would be interesting to see what that Olsen guy had gotten for Stacy. They didn't even stop at home but came directly to the silo entrance where I had been standing watching the city council leave.

"I expect you'll want to see Stacy," I said to Gary.

"She not too hard on the eyes, but no, I want to see you," he said, "And it's all rather personal so is there somewhere we could go?"

"We can go to my apartment," I offered.

"Perfect," he said.

I noticed that the 3 men were carrying several boxes of various sizes, and frankly I was beginning to get curious again. We made our way to our apartment and went into the living room where Stacy was watching a video on the TV.

"Where are the girls?" I asked.

"Oh, Jennifer came by and picked them up to play," Stacy said. "Did you get everything, Gary?"

"It was a challenge, but yes, we got everything," he replied. "Well almost. We couldn't get one item, but you can take care of that Stacy."

"Bill you're giving me that rifle was one of the nicest things that anyone has ever done for me," Gary started. "This whole thing started back in Palmdale after you came to me and invited us to move here to Roswell. I went out on the net and started doing some looking. I'm pretty handy when it comes to using the Internet to do research. I discover that there was a suspect in the killing of Stacy's father. Unfortunately they only knew the killer by his working name, Paladin. I knew who did that killing, or was pretty sure I did, and when you made the offer you did, I was positive. Anyway, I, we, hope you will accept these small gifts in the spirit they're offered. Let me start with the leather."

Gary handed me a package that contained a gun belt and holster. It carried the label Alfonso's Gun Leather. Inside were a black gun belt and holster with a small silver chess knight, also known to some as a paladin. The gun belt and holster were faithful reproduction of the rig that Richard Boone wore on the TV show. Gary then handed me a box containing a Ruger Vaquero with a 7½" barrel in .45 Colt. A third box contained a derringer in .38 Special. Gary stopped at that point and explained that the derringer that would have been carried, had Paladin been real, would probably have been .41 Rimfire but that he'd read an article that said anything over a .38 Special was impossible to handle and a .41 Rimfire was unavailable. The final box contained a black hat identical to the one Richard Boone wore on the show. Gary explained that he had to talk to Stacy

to get my waist size for the gun belt and hat size. Finally, Clarence handed me a Winchester Model 94 Legacy with a 24" barrel in the .45 Colt caliber.

Have Gun Will Travel – Chapter 15 – Locomotives

What Gary had been referring to when he'd said they couldn't get everything was those boots that Paladin wore. My beloved wife had been shopping, too. She had the black pants and shirts. I put everything away, for the moment, and went looking for Ritchie. I really wanted to see what the folks in Roswell had accomplished by acquiring those generators. It had, at least, seemed to make them a little more civil. And, if I recalled correctly, there was a store in town where I could get that pair of boots.

Roswell was doing much better and they had enough power that some of the people had been able to return to their homes. Ritchie scratched his head and looked around and wanted to know, "Where are the locomotives?"

"What are you talking about now?" I asked.

"Boss, when I was surfing the web checking out those solar panels, I ran across some website that talked about using locomotives as an emergency source of power," he replied. "One place even refurbished locomotives and had an accessory pack that let owners of private locomotives, like corporations, fix up their material handling equipment to provide power in case of a brownout or blackout."

He was right, again. Those diesel electric locomotives were nothing more than huge alternators driven by the diesel engine. I told him to go find the city council and give them the word; I wanted to go shopping for a pair of boots. I sure hoped we didn't have a big ice storm this winter. Those generators they'd stolen from that TV station were there to provide backup power in case an ice storm took out the power. Whoa, what was I thinking? What power? I found those boots ok, but they pinched my feet. The salesman assured me they'd get better as soon as I had them broken in.

A "Paladin" is defined in the American Heritage College Dictionary as a "paragon of chivalry; a heroic champion; a strong supporter or defender of a cause; and any of the 12 peers of French emperor Charlemagne's court." While the same dictionary does not specifically describe a knight as a Paladin or vice-versa, the knight's definition of "a defender, champion, or zealous upholder of a cause or principle" closely resembles the aforementioned definition of a Paladin.

Wheeling, WV - The oldest cigar maker in America, Marsh Wheeling, has closed its historic 161-year-old cigar factory in Wheeling, West Virginia, once considered the heart of the cigar industry.

John Berger & Son Co. of Cincinnati, which bought Marsh in 1988, transferred production of the product line to Marsh's sister company, National Cigar Corp., which will continue to make the machine-made Wheeling Stogies at its facility in Frankfort, Ind.

The move was prompted by declining sales, rising taxes, and fear of lawsuits: West Virginia is one of the few states where courts have recognized the right of healthy smokers

to sue tobacco companies for medical screening. A landmark class-action suit against the nation's largest cigarette makers was rejected there by a jury in December, but Marsh Wheeling lawyer Jim Gardill said shareholders consider the law too much of a liability.

"In this particular case, it played a role," he said. "You can get damages even though you've not been injured. That's a peculiar issue to explain to management in other states. It's just bizarre."

The long, thin cigars that Mifflin Marsh first rolled at his Wheeling home in 1840 were low-priced stogies aimed at the ordinary, middle-income smoker. Marsh sold the first stogies from a basket hooked on his arm, handing them out on steamboats that once worked the Ohio River. By the late 1800s, the cigars were so popular and inexpensive that taverns placed them on the counter like pretzels or toothpicks, free of charge.

If one is going to promote an image, he'd better go 'whole hog', I decided. So, I found a cigar store and bought some of the stogies that I had to bite the end off. They used them in the movies all the time, making you think that they were expensive cigars. They were expensive, that much was true, at least moving into 2006. But, they weren't expensive in the sense most people took it because they weren't exactly Havana's. On the other hand, they were long and thin and promoted the image from TV. When I got home, I showered and shaved, again, and got all dressed up in my 'Paladin Suit'. I stuck some cigars in my boot and when to see the Gary.

"Well, look at you," Sharon said when she answered the door. "GARY, BILL'S HERE. Come in Mr. Paladin."

"Hey, you found some boots!" Gary said walking into the kitchen and giving me the once over. "Did you find those cigars?"

I pulled a pair from my boots and handed him one.

"We'll have to go to my office, Bill, it's the only room in the house we can smoke in," Gary said. "Man, I haven't had a Marsh Wheeling cigar in years."

"I'm a little leery about dressing up as Paladin," I told him accepting a light. "What if people put 2 and 2 together?"

"Why should they?" he asked. "Alfonso's had sold dozens of those holsters, or so they told me. And the 3 of us are here in Roswell where you can keep tabs on us. But you will need a horse and saddle so you can go riding with us."

"I might do that," I admitted, "But Paladin was a solitary figure."

“And so you were,” he said. “Your reputation exceeds that of Carlos the Jackal, you know. But from everything I saw on the web, nobody has a clue as to who you are. Hell, even my wife thinks this fixing you up like Richard Boone is all just a gag.”

“I told Ritchie to talk to the city council about using locomotives to generate power,” I changed the subject. “By the way, the city council says that they considered your shooting of the Mayor and Chief of Police to be justified and there’s no warrant out on you.”

“Good. But I sort of figured, ‘Screw ‘em if they can’t take a joke’,” he replied.

“For a minute there I was wondering what the hell was going on between you and my wife,” I told him.

“You have a self-esteem problem?” he asked. “Reason I ask is ‘cause that wife of yours only has eyes for you, partner. She’s nice to look at and all, and a man’s allowed a little imagination. But been there, done that and Ronald was right, any woman who’d run around on her husband wouldn’t be worth having and your Stacy is definitely worth having. Next lifetime I’m going to marry me a redhead, just for chits and giggles.”

“So where do I find a horse?” I asked.

“At the stables,” he laughed. “That rifle you gave me must have set you back a bundle. The boys and I went the whole 9-yards and even got you the horse and saddle. It’s a big one, about 15 hands. But, being you’re as light as you are, we didn’t get a Morgan. Got you a Moroccan Barb stallion and I expect Sharon will kill me when she finds out. She always wanted an Arabian, but only a Morgan can carry her comfortably.”

“I’ll get you some of those cigars,” I told him, “And thanks for everything.”

“Hey no problem, Paladin,” he chuckled.

I noticed that Stacy had picked up some western cut shirts plus boots and a hat. I didn’t know if she rode or not, but I told Ritchie to find her an Arabian mare to go with the stallion they’d bought me. I also told him to find her a short-barreled Vaquero and a gun belt, holster and rifle. If we were going to play cowboys and Indians, we might as well do it right. Norma and he hitched a trailer to a Hummer and took off the next day. They were back in under a week and he gave me a thumb up then handed me some boxes. Inside of one was an El Paso Saddlery Co. 1890 “Original” holster and belt. He said the rifle was the same as mine and that the tack was at the stables with the mare.

Long story short, I gave her the gear and she did a fashion show. The skintight blue jeans and form hugging western cut shirt... All I could think was, “Dale Evans, eat your heart out.” Fortunately, Jennifer had the girls for another 3 hours...

It wouldn’t be the 4 amigos, I decided. It was Paladin and Lady plus The Three Amigos. We still didn’t have the electricity back on and there was still the radio and TV blackout.

I half expected that any day the Army would swoop in, in their Apache's and Blackhawk's, to restore law and order. Didn't happen; it was as if Roswell had fallen off the earth. The city council listened to Ritchie and started to round up locomotives. When they had enough and Roswell was fully powered up, they loaded up those two generators they'd stolen and returned them to KSWs.

Cut off from the country as we were, in some ways Roswell reverted to earlier times. There wasn't a whole lot of diesel fuel in the town and they had to go foraging. The city was burning enough diesel fuel keeping the lights on that they didn't even have to stabilize it. At least not at first; but they just kept foraging and eventually they had so much fuel on hand they didn't have any choice. Neither did they have any PRI-D. A 55-gallon drum of PRI-D would stabilize 110,000-gallons of diesel. Ritchie gave them 10 drums and told them they'd better start scrounging for more of the stabilizer rather than fuel. I expect that they must have made a trip to Houston because they returned those 10 drums of PRI-D.

Anyone who was curious about my new attire got told that I was a TV junkie and they let it go at that. One day in early May of 2006 when The Three Amigos and I were out riding south by the gun range we noticed those Apache's and Blackhawk's that I'd been worried about. I figured that Roswell was dead meat but they didn't even slow down. They were headed towards the southwest so I sort of figured they were headed to Alamogordo and either White Sands or Ft. Bliss.

You thought I was joking about cowboys and Indians, right? The Mescalero Apache Indian Reservation is located to the northeast of Alamogordo. It was about 87 miles by road and only about 75 miles as the crow flies from Roswell. We were later to learn that we weren't the only people in New Mexico to go a little bit primitive. They had the Casino Apache, the Inn of the Mountain Gods and Mescalero Inn, plus their own telephone system, Mescalero Apache Telecom, Inc. There was also the Mescalero Tribal Store, Mescalero Metal Fabrication and Mescalero Gas Company. In many respects the tribes depended upon tourism and there weren't any tourists. The Res was the home of the Mescalero, Chiricahua and Lipan Apache. These folks were pretty self-dependent and didn't need to go on the warpath. But, the way I heard it the Army came busting in, raising hell, and they'd had enough of that.

Of course, at the time, there weren't any communications and we didn't know anything about it. But the Army was in the area, for sure, because Ritchie told me that that SINCGARS was full of chatter. To top it off, the citizens of Roswell had gotten pretty independent themselves. Once we'd killed a few of them and made them pull their heads out, they began to scrounge far and wide. They were bringing in food by the semi load and had more than enough fuel for those locomotives that were now their primary source of power. And then, KINF AM radio and KRPV, KBIM, K15FT, K17EM, KOBR, K50FG and K13RK, all TV stations, came back on the air. They didn't have any outside news, but were running a lot of movies.

One of those reporters must have made a trip to Alamogordo because we heard about some unrest on the Res. Nothing specific, you understand, just that the folks over there didn't want any more *white eyes* coming around until they got settled up with the Army. This news was unsettling to The Three Amigos and it was then that I learned of the division in their camp. It seemed that Gary and Sharon were 'Indian Lovers' Clarence was neutral, probably because of the race thing, and Ronald and his brother Robert up in northern New Mexico, just south of Durango, CO, absolutely disliked Indians. Not that The Three Amigos fought about it, but they sure had different attitudes. Gary was all for saddling up and riding over to Alamogordo to help his Indian brethren, Clarence could have cared less and Ron would only go if he could shoot a couple of those Apaches.

Stacy turned out to be quite the horsewoman. Hell, she could ride a whole lot better than I could. She explained to me that 'Daddy Dearest' had tried to buy her off by getting her riding lessons. A fat lot of good that did him; I'd gotten him right between the eyes with the first shot and after the car smashed into another car at the curb, had added a couple more just to be sure. I'd fired 3 shots but could only find two of my casings so John Law had some evidence on me. That was another reason I initially gave the Barrett to Gary. I figured that if they ever matched that casing to the rifle he'd die rather than give me up. I figured that Ron and Clarence were probably the same way and that I had nothing to fear. Turns out I was right.

Have Gun Will Travel – Chapter 16 – Government Trouble

The fellas didn't go over to Mescalero and avoided having to decide which side was right. We were getting along fine and in June the new gardens were starting to come up. This riding pastime was getting addictive and I left Ritchie to run things and sometimes the 8 of us went riding and others only the 4 of us. On this particular morning, we rode up to the silo and were just riding up and down the streets looking things over. I heard the choppers, but figured they were headed to Alamogordo. Man, was I wrong.

I can't begin to tell you how many of them there were, certainly more than a few. They landed all around the trailer park and began to disgorge troops. There were also some civilians mixed in who turned out to be FBI. Before our security people could react in any meaningful way, they busted into the trailer park and began searching door-to-door. The guys and I rode up to the gate and dismounted to have a word with whoever was in charge.

"What's the meaning of this?" I asked in my most assertive voice.

"Hey lookie here," one of the soldiers said, "It's another one of those Paladin nuts. How many does that make?"

"Something I can do for you?" an officer asked.

"I own this trailer park and missile silo and I want to know what you think you're doing," I demanded.

"What's your name, Paladin?" the office asked.

"I'm William Rogers and I want to know what you think you're doing," I responded.

"William Rogers, huh?" the officer said looking at a piece of paper. "Well, that's the name on the records for this property. I'll tell you exactly what we're doing Rogers; we're searching for military style firearms. It is an offense under the new Executive Order to have military weapons of any kind."

"You don't say," I snapped, "What ever happened to the Constitution?"

"It's been suspended because of the attacks," he replied.

"You can't suspend the Constitution," Gary growled.

"Who are you?" the officer asked.

"My name is Gary Olsen and I'm a resident here," Gary replied, "What's it to you?"

“The Constitution HAS been suspended, Olsen and you’d better shut up or you’ll be arrested for obstruction of justice,” the officer replied.

“You can’t do that, it’s Unconstitutional,” Gary replied.

“In order for it to be Unconstitutional, there has to be a Constitution,” the officer laughed and “I told you, it’s been suspended.”

“Hey Major, check this out,” a soldier said walking up with the Barrett rifle I’d given Gary.

“Where did you get that rifle soldier?” the Major asked.

“The lady said her last name was Olsen,” the soldier explained.

“Relative of yours?” the Major asked Gary.

“My wife Major and I’ll thank you to return my rifle,” Gary said.

“No can do, it’s a military style weapon,” the Major replied.

Out of the corner of my eye I noticed Gary, Ron and Clarence slipping the thongs off the hammers of their Colts. About that time another soldier came up carrying all of the ammo and empty casings for that rifle. One of those FBI guys reached into the pail of empty casings and pulled out one. He looked at it closely and turned to a colleague. “Hey Harry, did we bring the file folder with those pictures of the shell casings? I need the one that had pictures of the .50 calibers casings.”

Another agent, Harry I presume, handed the first agent a file folder. I could see from my vantage point that it had enlarged pictures of casing head stamps. The agent kept looking at the casing and then at the pictures until he found a match.

“Whee doggie,” he said, “Would you look at that? These casings match the casing we picked up in LA a few years back when that hired gun named Paladin killed the mobster.”

“Where did you get the rifle Olsen?” the agent asked.

“Bought it back in Palmdale before I moved to New Mexico,” Gary said evenly.

“When was that?” the agent asked.

“Let me think,” Gary said. “That was September 12, 2001.”

“How can you be sure of the date?” the agent asked.

“Because I bought it the day after those terrorists brought the World Trade Center down,” he replied.

“Buy it through a gun dealer?” the agent asked.

“Naw, from a private party,” Gary said. “Can I have my rifle back now?”

“Did you register the transaction as required by law?” the agent wanted to know.

“How the hell could I do that?” Gary asked. “The rifle was illegal in California. But, it is legal here in New Mexico so give me my rifle back.”

“Who did you buy the rifle from?” the agent asked.

“Uh, Dough,” Gary said after a moment. “Yeah that’s it; he said his name was John Dough.”

I leaned over to Gary and whispered in his left ear, the good one, “Forget it Gar-Bear, I’ll replace the rifle.”

“Sons-of-Bitches,” Gary hissed to me under his breath. “That’s why I’m a Patron member of the NRA.”

“What did you say about the NRA?” the agent asked. “Membership in that organization is now a felony.”

“I said I ought to contact the NRA,” Gary replied. The old boy was quicker on his feet than I thought.

“You do and you’ll go to jail for sure,” the agent snapped. “We’ll put you in the cell with Charlton Heston.”

“You boys locked up Moses?” Gary asked. “Son-of-a-Bitch!”

“He was a lousy actor anyway,” Harry said. “We’ll probably let him go; he doesn’t even know his name anymore because of the Alzheimer’s. Keeps saying his name is Judah.”

They searched the houses from top to bottom, but that Barrett rifle was the only ‘illegal’ weapon they found. Then they went through the silo with a fine-tooth comb. When you opened the doors to the armories, all you saw was a pile of boxes, one of Ritchie’s little tricks. And the boxes were mounted to solid doors and gave the impression that the rooms were filled to the brim with boxes of Uncle Ben’s Converted Rice. The boxes were 2 layers deep so if they pulled out a box to check, that’s what they saw, a case of Uncle Ben’s. Ritchie was a friggin’ genius.

Of course Gary had shut up after the Ben Hur remark. Standing there, I could almost see the gears churning in his head. I didn't know him well enough to know what he might be planning, but I was relatively certain that whatever it was some people would be very sorry they took that rifle I'd given him. Apparently the feds decided that Gary was all bark and no bite because they didn't haul him off in handcuffs. He was 63 years old and pretty crippled up with his diabetes in the early summer of 2006. But his brain still worked well when he wasn't having memory lapses. That afternoon, The Three Amigos went into town and bought a load of fertilizer for the gardens. In fact, they had to make several trips and I just assumed they were stocking up for the next year or so because fertilizer might be hard to get until the country got straightened out.

For maybe the next 10 days, I didn't see much of The Three Amigos so Stacy and I went riding alone. Ritchie told me that the old guys wanted to borrow some of our empty 55-gallon drums and I told him to go ahead and let them have them, we had a lot by this time, what with changing the oil in the generator and stabilizing the diesel fuel. A couple of days later, Ritchie said the old boys had needed some diesel fuel and they pumped some into some drums. He wondered aloud if maybe they were planning on returning to California but I told him that there was nothing in California that they couldn't find here in Roswell. He said they hadn't taken all that much fuel anyway, maybe 5-6 gallons per drum.

"Sorry about that Bill," Gary said, "We were working on a small project. Maybe we can go riding tomorrow. After that the guys and I are taking off for a day, but we won't be gone long."

"Sure," I said, "We'll ride tomorrow. Will it be just us fellas or will it include the wives?"

"Probably just the four of us," he answered. "Say did you hear about the theft of that dynamite and the blasting caps from the explosives place in Roswell?"

"I hadn't heard," I admitted, "What did they take?"

"Well, I heard that they took dynamite, blasting caps, det cord and some timers," he replied.

"Huh," I said. "What would anyone want with explosives?"

"Well I assume that they took them so they could blow something up," he chuckled. "Say I was talking to the new Police Chief and he was telling me that they have my rifle on display at the federal building in El Paso."

"Really?" I said. "That surprises me. I figured they'd send it to the FBI lab in Washington."

"No sir," he says, "They have it right in the lobby of that federal building at 700 East San Antonio in El Paso. Well, we'll see you tomorrow."

I noticed late that night that the fellas had rented a moving truck and were loading something into it. I was going to go ask what that was about, but I got busy and decided that could wait until we went riding the next day.

“So, where are you guys going tomorrow?” I asked the next morning during our ride.

“We’re going down to El Paso,” Gary said. “We got a truck and loaded some things aboard it that we need to deliver down there. It will be a one-way trip for the truck and we’ll drop it off there. And while we were at it, we thought maybe we’d stop by El Paso Saddlery and pick up some more holsters.”

“You boys drive real careful,” I suggested.

“You can count on that Paladin,” Clarence laughed. “We’ll avoid every bump in the road.”

“What time are you boys leaving?” I asked.

“About 8 o’clock,” Gary replied.

“Mind if I ride along?” I asked. “Or is this one of those secret missions of yours?”

“It is that,” Gary admitted, “But if you want to run the risk, you’d be welcome. The only thing is I want your promise that you won’t interfere with our secret mission.”

“Sure, you have my word,” I chuckled.

“This is a secret mission and it isn’t a laughing matter, Bill,” Gary said sharply.

“I said you have my word,” I replied.

The next morning I was over at Gary’s around 7:30am. He told me to go back to the silo and get my Paladin Suit and my revolver, derringer and rifle. Odd, I thought, but what the hell. I was back in about 15 minutes and I noticed that Gary not only had his rifle and that 1860 holster and Vaquero but two Ruger gun boxes. Then I looked closer and discovered that all 3 of the amigos had 2 extra guns. Once we were in El Paso, our first stop was the Saddlery. There, each of the amigos bought a Hollywood Fast Draw Rig Double Holster and a Tombstone Speed Shoulder rig. When we got back to the pickup, they stopped and loaded cartridges into the belts. Then, they opened the boxes and added another 7½” Vaquero to the holster on the left side and a 4⁵/₈” Vaquero to the shoulder rig. Damon was driving the big truck for the fellas and he never left it.

Our second stop was at the federal building located at 700 East San Antonio. The fellas asked me to stay in the pickup truck and cover their backs. I noticed that Damon parked the big truck at the curb in front of the building and came and joined me in the pickup. I

was about to ask him what this was all about when the shooting started. Damon fired up the motor of the pickup and told me to fasten my seatbelt. He did a U-Turn and pulled up right in front of the federal building next to where the U-Haul rental truck was parked. The Three Amigos jumped in and he made tracks. Gary was carrying that Barrett rifle and had a smirk on his face. We got about a mile when a massive explosion rocked the truck. Of course, how could I have been so stupid? Hell, I didn't even turn around and look; I just knew that federal building was a pile of ruins.

"Hey, won't they trace that truck to you?" I asked.

"How are they going to do that?" Gary asked. "Damon stole that truck yesterday morning from Flagstaff, Arizona."

"Which means that he left a car there that they can trace," I suggested.

"Naw, Kevin dropped him off," Ron said.

"Where is Kevin?" I asked.

"Hell, I don't know," Ron said, "He probably got arrested for speeding again. That boy has a solid lead foot."

When we arrived back at the trailer park, Kevin's car was sitting there so there must have been another explanation for his absence. Turns out he got thirsty and got a motel room and a case of beer in Holbrook and tied one on out of his Mom and Dad's reach. I didn't see any more of the Barrett rifle, but Gary assured me it was safe. As it turned out, while the guys were in California they'd really loaded up on Rugers. Not only did they have the blued Vaqueros that they carried in their new rigs, but also they had the nickel-plated Vaqueros shown in the photo of the Paladin holster set. These latter guns were now in their model 1860 Civil War holsters. They also had nickel plated guns for their single holster fast draw rigs they were wearing the day the Army came.

Have Gun Will Travel – Chapter 17 – More Government Trouble

I should have figured that the government would be back when they got the rubble from the federal building in El Paso cleaned up and couldn't find the Barrett rifle. But, for some reason it never occurred to me. In late July we were out riding, the four of us, when I heard those choppers again. We headed up to the trailer park as fast as Gary was willing to ride which meant that we walked the horses. It was only about a mile so it didn't take that long. Gary had confided to me that he really didn't know why he bought the double rig. His left hand was so numb that all it was good for was lifting the gun from the left side holster so he could take it and shoot it with his right hand. He said it was the ravages of his diabetes.

Those boys sure did have their share of Ruger revolvers. Time was when a man was lucky to own one and they only cost about \$20 at the time. By my count, they had the single holster fast draw rig, the 1860 Civil War holster, the double holster rig and those Tombstone shoulder rigs and guns for all of the leather, which made about 5 of the Vaqueros apiece. I noticed that they spent a lot of time on the range, too. I went along one day and learned that they spent a lot of time practicing both shooting and their fast draw. It didn't matter how fast you could draw a gun if you couldn't hit the target after the gun cleared leather. Gary told me there was some TV show from the late '50's called *The Restless Gun*. On the show, Gary said, John Payne had taught a guy the fast draw but had made him learn by learning accuracy first and the fast draw second. Once Payne taught the kid both, he'd turned on Payne and found out that Payne hadn't taught him everything.

Gary said that if I'd ever paid any attention to *Gunsmoke*, Marshal Dillon was outdrawn by a bad guy more than once. Dillon was alive because he was more accurate than he was fast. Well, it was only a TV show, but it seemed to make sense. Maybe I should spend some time practicing with the single action; it wasn't too smart to walk around with a gun strapped on just for looks.

It was the same bunch of federal people and they liked to tore the trailer park to pieces searching for that Barrett rifle that they assumed Gary had taken. Apparently they'd had someone in town checking out the fellas because they were also looking for the fertilizer. They had copies of the purchase receipts and when they finished counting they only came up one bag short. They were all set to arrest Gary when he told them to look in his shed. In the shed was a half full bag of fertilizer. They were fit to be tied. All of the fertilizer was accounted for and they found none of the stolen explosives. By this time I was a bit puzzled myself. Then they hit The Three Amigos homes with metal detectors and aside from finding the screening in the floor, ceilings and walls didn't find any metal that didn't belong. I was beginning to think they'd arrest the guys' just on general principles but they packed up and left. But it was sort of like Santa Claus leaving, you knew they'd be back.

"How did you pull that off?" I asked.

“Pull what off?” Gary asked back.

“The whole thing,” I said. “You had all of the fertilizer you bought and I know you have that rifle hidden, so how did you do it?”

“Well, we stole as much fertilizer as we bought,” he laughed. “We bought all of the fertilizer in one place and took a little bit from each of the others. The dynamite doesn’t react to that radar stuff of theirs and it’s buried in the backyard. The rifle is in the attic, almost in plain view if you know where to look. You know those metal vent pipes for the toilets? It’s strapped to one of them.”

“Wait a minute, those vent pipes are PVC,” I said.

“Check for yourself,” he shook his head.

Sure enough, the PVC vent pipes had been replaced with metal pipes and you didn’t even have to go all of the way into the attic to see the galvanized finish. Apparently Gar-Bear was trusting on luck and the people being a little bit lazy. I crawled into the attic and on the backside of the further vent pipe I found the Barrett. That still left a lot unexplained, but I was tired of feeling foolish and stopped asking. Since the amigos all had 2 of the 7½” nickel-plated Vaqueros and 2 of the 7½” blued Vaqueros, they frequently switched guns between holsters. I presumed they did that just to keep everyone off balance. Ron said something about never being predictable.

I started to spend more time on the range with the fellas, if I was supposed to be Paladin like on TV; I’d darn well better learn to use that gun I had. By early fall I was as good as or better than any of those 3 old men. I was both fast and accurate, probably due to my superior training. Then one day, they informed me it was time to take on the Army. I had visions of our Hummers going up against their tanks and Apaches and it kept me awake all night. The Three Amigos had an entirely different idea. I guess Gary must have had a long talk with Ron because one day we saddled up and loaded some pack animals and headed towards the southwest.

It became apparent almost immediately that we were headed to the Res. Gary told me that the Res was one of his favorite places and figured prominently in much of his fiction. He said he wasn’t interested in undoing what had been done to the original inhabitants of this great land but he wasn’t going to add to their misery. He thought it was fitting and proper that they had those casinos and were finally raking in the bucks after all those years of living in the ‘white man’s squalor’. I suggested that maybe I shouldn’t have worn the Paladin outfit and Ron said nonsense. Paladin, he said, represented an idea and anyone who knew of the old TV show had a certain expectation of how Paladin would act. So long as I kept that in mind, it would go a long ways towards establishing trust with the folks on the Mescalero Reservation.

“So am I the 4th amigo or a goodwill ambassador?” I asked.

“You set the ground rules and said it was The Three Amigos and Paladin and his Lady,” Clarence blurted out. “So let’s just leave it at that. We gonna have some fun messing with the Army, Mr. Paladin, I can tell you that. They gonna play by modern rules and we’re gonna play like it’s the 1880’s.”

“None of us were alive back then,” I suggested, “So how do we know what it was like in the 1880’s?”

“We don’t,” Gary said, “But neither do they. We’re going to start out playing it like they did in the movies and after a while they’ll figure we’re playing according to some script. After that happens, we’ll reverse and double-reverse so they won’t know if we’re coming or going.”

“Yeah right,” I said. “Those boys have helicopters and tanks.”

“And we have the 10th Calvary,” Clarence laughed.

“What do the Buffalo Soldiers have to do with this?” I asked.

“Tenacity and temerity,” Clarence replied

“Can you even spell tenacity or temerity, Clarence?” Ron asked.

“Maybe I can and maybe I can’t, Ron, but I know what they mean,” Clarence replied evenly. “So brave and courageous were these men that their legendary Indian foes called them Buffalo Soldiers. Their commanding officer, Colonel Benjamin H. Grierson of Civil War fame, said the name was given because the Indians respected a brave and powerful adversary, which relates directly to their much-revered buffalo. Others say it was due to the similarity of the soldier’s hair to that of the hair surrounding the buffalo’s head. The Tenth had the lowest desertion rate in the army, though their army posts were often in the worst country in the west. Official reports, show these soldiers were frequently subjected to the harshest of discipline, racist officers, and poor food, equipment and shelter.”

“Ron,” I ventured, “It would seem to me that he knows what they mean.”

“Maybe, but we have something the 10th Calvary didn’t,” Ron chuckled.

“What might that be?” Clarence asked.

“Interceptor vests,” Ron smiled coyly.

“Was I supposed to bring an Interceptor vest?” I asked, because I most certainly hadn’t.

“Ritchie packed it for you, Paladin,” Gary said. “This isn’t a suicide mission.”

I was hoping that the vest they packed was black. It wouldn't do for the legendary Paladin to be seen hiding behind protection. Those 3 men might be blowing smoke so, when we stopped that first night out, I took the opportunity to inspect the packs. Sure enough there was an Interceptor vest in black for me. Allow me to point out that in this conflict I wasn't a knight without armor in a hostile land. There were also LAW's and grenades and dynamite. They must have talked to Stacy because there were plenty of my favorite Mountain House meals. And just in case it was needed, there was the Barrett rifle and some MP5's that I didn't even know we had. Ritchie, again.

The next morning we were off after sunup. It would have been sooner, but they had to have their coffee. We'd made 40 miles the first day, not bad, considering. I sure was glad I'd been riding a lot with the boys; else I would have had saddle sores. We were barely on the Res when the Apaches approached us. Maybe you can tell one Apache from another, but they all looked like Indians to me. I had thought to pack two boxes of cigars in my saddlebags and we all sat down for a smoke. They seemed to ignore Ron and Gary and to concentrate on Clarence and me. They wanted to know if Clarence was a real Buffalo Soldier and he told them only in spirit. That seemed good enough for them and they turned their attention to me.

Was I really Paladin, they wanted to know. Yes, I told them I was; but not the guy from the TV show that had died in 1981. Was I real a hired gun, they asked and I answered truthfully that I was. I admitted that I hadn't attended West Point like the TV hero but told them I was an Army Ranger with 2 tours in Nam. That seemed to impress them; they had lost brothers in Nam. The fact that I managed to survive 2 tours impressed them even more. I also explained that I hadn't finished the 2nd tour and that a punji stick had done me in. One of them said something about punji sticks being bad medicine and I figured I was in.

I hadn't had time to check the last 2 packhorses the night before and was rather surprised when the amigos unlimbered a pile of M16's and magazines. The other horse held .223 ammo. Not a lot, only 5,000 rounds, but enough to get started. Gary and Ron moved into the circle and began to outline what they had in mind in the most general of terms. The residents of the Res allowed as how this approach was very Apache in nature and would have made Geronimo proud. I gave the residents my box of the lighter wrapped cigars and passed out a few of the dark ones to The Three Amigos. We were good to go.

The Army had stationed a group of Blackhawk's to transport Infantry and 4 Apaches to provide air cover. The Apache Indians had left them alone out of fear of the FLIR on the Apache helicopters. In operation Iraqi Freedom, I wondered if that was still going on, insurgents using the RPG-7's had brought several of the AH-64 helicopters down. The LAW was akin to the RPG-7, both were 66mm projectiles. The Blackhawk's were first deployed in 1978 while I was off in Africa. However, during my days with the Agency I became very familiar with the aircraft and their vulnerabilities. A properly placed round of armor piercing .50BMG ammunition could disable the GE Engines.

Since Gary had the Barrett rifle with the laser range finding scope, he could get the distances to each of the 4 Apache choppers. The maximum range of the M72 was 200 meters unless the exact range was known. In this latter instance, the maximum range was 225 meters. Provided the attack helicopters were within range, we could attack them from our present position using the LAW's. Otherwise, someone would have to move closer. I pointed out the vulnerabilities of the Blackhawk's to Gary and when I was confident that he understood he began to range the AH-64's. As luck would have it, 3 were within 200 meters and the 4th was barely 230 meters away. We decided to chance the 4th AH-64; it was only 30 extra meters. The LAW rocket comes 5 to the container so we doubled up on that 4th bird.

Gary began to fire rounds into the Blackhawk's and either the sounds of his firing or the damage to one of the choppers brought the military to full alert. The moment there was movement toward the Apaches, the first 4 LAW's were fired. This time we wouldn't need the 5th. Gary had 3 of the Blackhawk's disabled and was working on number 4. It took 2 rounds to disable that bird. He swapped magazines and went for number 5. It was a one-shot kill and number 6 a 2-shot kill. Number 7 was having a good day and Gary needed a third magazine to bring it to task. He finished off number 8 with the remainder of the third magazine and we departed the area.

"Maybe you should re-sight the Barrett and use it," Gary suggested.

"You got all 8," I told him.

"With 15 rounds of ammo," he grouched. "I'm not giving back the rifle, but I've seen you use it. Go ahead, you won't hurt my feelings."

I really didn't want to take the rifle because I was long out of practice. But he insisted and I took it. I found an area out of sight and hearing of the soldiers and spent some time getting back into form. While I was off doing that, The Three Amigos and the Apaches harassed those soldiers something fierce. Instead of a steady rain of fire, they'd pop a round off and then wait; sometimes a minute and sometimes 5. It was some more of Gary's strategy of being unpredictable. Eventually the soldiers got off a radio call and reinforcements arrived. There were some caves and some dugouts and my friends and those Indians went to ground. I burned off about 100 rounds until I was totally satisfied with my shooting. It may not sound like much, but even with the suppressor and the barrel spring that Barrett had a kick.

I got close to where I'd left them and could see the 2 new Apaches and 4 new Blackhawk's. I dug out the FRS radio and called Gary. He whispered back that I ought to stay under cover until dark. After that the Indian who was with him would find me and we'd all move to a safer position. I'd have tried to take out the Apaches with the rifle but I wasn't that familiar with the aircraft. There was no way I was going to open fire on the Blackhawk's with 2 Apaches sitting there. You don't get to be between 55 and 60 by being stupid. A while later I heard voices and assumed, correctly, that it was an undisciplined patrol. They were making a fair amount of noise just trying to be quiet. They

weren't doing themselves any good with the loud whispers. That was a lesson that I'd learned in 'Nam.

They moved on and shortly after dark I was startled to feel a hand on my shoulder. It was one of the Indians and he put a finger to his lips and then curled a finger for me to follow. 20 minutes later we were clear of the area and I rejoined The Three Amigos.

"You good with the rifle again?" Gary asked.

"I suppose I can hold my own out to 1,000-yards," I told him.

"Let's get the horses and get out of here, Gar-Bear," Ron suggested.

Our hosts were just finishing cinching the saddles when we got to the horses so we mounted up and rode over to Mescalero. There were introductions all around and then a hot meal. And tonight it would be a regular bed instead of the sleeping bag. Those insulate pads aren't big enough and could stand to be much thicker, you know. The Therm-a-rest pads would have been much better, especially if we'd had the full sized pads.

"Four Apaches and eight transport choppers wasn't bad, Gar-Bear," Ron was saying. "Why did you give the rifle back to Paladin?"

"Ron it took me 15 shots to take out 8 choppers," Gary replied. "You've seen how he shoots; he never misses. Besides, I didn't give the rifle back to him, I just asked him to use it on this trip."

"Yeah, Ron," Clarence added, "I've seen that guy shoot up in the Angeles Forest, he's good."

"That was a long time ago guys," Ron said.

"Ron my best shooting was with the M1A at 600 yards," Gary countered. "That Barrett rifle is nice and I really like it, but it kicks."

"You probably weren't holding it right," Ron suggested.

"I can give Gary the rifle back," I joined the conversation.

"Like hell you will," Gary snapped. "We do the best we can with what we have and I am not a trained shooter. You were a Ranger and I'm sure they taught you to shoot."

When had I told him that? Oh right, he must have overheard when I was briefing the Indians about my background. But Ron and he were off to the side and couldn't have heard that conversation. Gary was sitting with his bad ear turned towards us visiting with Ron. Hmm, maybe Gary had done more checking on my background than he'd re-

vealed. Well, it didn't matter, we were all in this together and covering each other's backs. It was good that he knew of my Ranger background, it was Specials Forces.

Have Gun Will Travel – Chapter 18 – The Thorn

We hadn't killed any of those soldiers, not intentionally at least. They were Americans the same as we, and that was a line that would be hard to cross. Gary pointed out that having Derek in Korea for 13 months and then in Kosovo for 6 months had amounted to 19 months of dread. He related that there were times that he looked out the window of his office just waiting for a staff car to pull up with news that his son was dead, wounded or missing in action. Ron hadn't been in the military and neither had his sons or daughters. And Clarence simply refused to discuss the subject.

We needed to take one or more prisoners to find out what was going on. Preferably someone young who had earned some rank, like a corporal or sergeant. The Apache moving in on me undetected came to mind and I wondered aloud if perhaps our hosts could manage the same with some of those soldiers.

"How many do you want?" Travis Chino asked.

"Maybe a couple," I suggested.

"Tell you what, Paladin," Travis smiled. "We'll slip in and grab a corporal and a sergeant, that's what you said you wanted, right? Then we'll do some of our Indian stuff and you can open fire with those rockets and that fancy rifle and take out the new choppers."

The dark would be our ally in this adventure. We rested for the day and late in the afternoon saddled up and headed back to that military encampment. We staked out the horses and began to move closer. Travis and 3 others slipped off, presumably to go soldier hunting. We took up a position different than the first time and I ranged the 2 Apache helicopters. They were only 175 and 185 meters away, an 'easy' reach for the LAW's. Then I ranged the 4 Blackhawk's and adjusted the scope accordingly. I laid out 2 extra magazines though I doubted I'd need them. Maybe 30 minutes later I heard a night owl hoot and the Apache beside me laid his hand on my shoulder. Ron and Clarence readied the LAW's and I took my first shot disabling one Blackhawk. They fired the rockets hitting the AH-64s and the battle was joined. The Three Amigos and the 3 Apaches laid down light suppression fire and I finished off the Blackhawk's, needing only 2 shots for one and single shots for the others.

When Travis and his 3 companions joined us dragging 2 unconscious soldiers we retired back to Mescalero. Other than a lump on the head, the soldiers would be fine, Travis assured me. They were awake by the time we reached the community and we took both of them into a conference room and got them coffee and some aspirin. It was obvious, even to them, that any improper behavior on their part would bring an immediate response from us.

"Look boys," I told them, "Tell us what we want to know and we'll let you escape back to your outfit. All we want is a little information. We're all Americans here but you have in-

formation and we want it. You start that name, rank, service number and date of birth crap on us and I give you to our Apache friends.”

“What kind of information?” the sergeant asked. “And who in the hell do you think you are, Paladin?”

“Actually, Paladin in my name,” I replied. “What we want to know is what is going on in the country. The lights went out in August and the communications have been down since. What’s the deal, has the country been invaded or something?”

“That’s all you want to know?” the sergeant asked. “You don’t want military information?”

“What an idiot,” I thought. Just finding out what was going on with our country WAS military information from our perspective. Were soldiers different these days?

“That’s right sergeant,” I said, “Bring us up to speed with what’s happened since August and we’ll see about letting you go.”

“The President wasn’t feeling well and he went into Bethesda for an exam,” the sergeant said. “The doctors decided that he needed a bypass, so they passed the reins to Cheney and he went into surgery. While they were doing the operation, a bunch of terrorists attacked the infrastructure and brought down the power. The media wasn’t given any information about the President’s condition and there was a total media blackout about it. Besides, those terrorists struck and the media had a new story to report.”

“Bush came out of the surgery ok, but those strikes against the country were well orchestrated and before anyone could really react,” he continued, “The terrorists took down the communications centers. You might be surprised how much of our communications is dependent on satellites-I know that I was. So with Bush in the hospital and the VP running the country as Acting President, the new Secretary of DHS cranks the threat level to red and Cheney issues some Executive Orders. Some of the power stations in the northeast were hit with nukes creating a terrible mess that everyone has been working on cleaning up ever since.”

“It doesn’t make any sense,” Gary snapped. There was the line again from the end of ‘Midway’, where Admiral Nimitz commented on what Charlton Heston would have said. “We have been in a total communications blackout since August. On 2 separate occasions, Army troops hit our housing area looking for guns. They said the Constitution was suspended and things like membership in the NRA were a felony. Explain that to me, sergeant.”

“That came later after Bush died,” the sergeant said. “Nobody was able to stop the attack on our infrastructure and eventually, Cheney signed more Executive Orders temporarily suspending Constitutional guarantees. It all gets confusing after that and most of us just followed orders.”

“So let me get this straight,” I said. “Bush is dead, Cheney is President, we’ve been attacked by terrorists using nukes and the President and DHS have suspended the Constitution?”

“Almost,” the sergeant said. “Except Cheney isn’t President anymore. Before he could appoint a new Vice president, he had a heart attack and died.”

“So that means the Speaker of the House is President,” Gary said.

“No,” the sergeant said, “But you’re getting closer. The Speaker was killed in an auto accident along with the President Pro Tem of the Senate. That was a very strange deal, I’ll tell you. The President is a woman, Condoleezza Rice.”

“You’re telling us that a political science professor is running the country?” Gary butted in.

“Her. And the military,” the sergeant acknowledged.

“What’s the military have to do with it?” I asked.

“She ordered an immediate withdrawal from Afghanistan and Iraq,” the sergeant explained. “Then she got cozy with the Joint Chiefs.”

“So why the information blackout?” Ron asked.

“When they suspended the Constitution, they clamped down of the media,” he replied.

“Who is ‘they’?” I asked.

“Oh, the President and the Joint Chiefs, together with the Director of Homeland Security and the Director of FEMA.”

“Put the blindfolds back on these two,” I suggested, “And drop them off back at that encampment.”

“You’re going to let them go?” Ron asked.

“I’m not going to kill an American soldier who was just doing his job,” I said. “I’m Paladin, remember. But if I were the sergeant or the corporal, I’d find a different line of work. Did you hear me sergeant?”

“Yes sir,” the sergeant replied.

This really didn’t make any sense. I could see the President and the DHS tangled up in something, but FEMA was part of DHS and had no independent Director. And, the Joint

Chiefs were sworn to protect and defend the Constitution. Maybe we had more information, but I was about as confused as a man could be. Gary was right it didn't make any sense.

"The closest that I ever came to a scenario like this," Gary said, "Was in my story entitled *Preparations*. In that story I had Wesley Clark staging a coup d'état."

Guardian coups - These coups have been described as musical chairs. The stated aim of this form of coup is to improve public order, efficiency, or to end corruption. There is usually no fundamental shift in the structure of power, and the leaders of these types of coups generally portray their actions as a temporary and unfortunate necessity. Many nations with guardian coups undergo many shifts between civilian and military governments. The term self-coup is used when the current government assumes extraordinary powers not allowed by the legislation. A self-coup occurs when a country's leader dissolves the national legislature and assumes extraordinary powers not granted under normal circumstances. Other measures taken may include annulling the nation's constitution and suspending civil courts. In most cases the head of state is granted dictatorial powers.

Now, if the United States had experienced either a guardian coup or a self-coup that would explain a lot. But, there was something else the sergeant had said that really piqued my curiosity. "Nobody was able to stop the attack on our infrastructure..." Could the attack on the country's infrastructure been some part of a plot to create a National Emergency thus allowing the coup? And, if there had been a coup, what could a small group of civilians from New Mexico and the Apache Nation do about it?

"There is a great question between the Apache and the Government. For twenty years we have been held prisoners of war under a treaty, which was made with General Miles, on the part of the United States Government, and myself as the representative of the Apaches. That treaty has not at all times been properly observed by the Government, although at the present time it is being more nearly fulfilled on their part the heretofore. In the treaty with General Miles we agreed to go to a place outside of Arizona and learn to live as the white people do. I think that my people are now capable of living in accordance with the laws of the United States, and we would, of course, like to have the liberty to return to that land which is ours by divine right. We are reduced in numbers, and having learned how to cultivate the soil would not require so much ground as was formerly necessary. We do not ask all of the land, which the Almighty gave us in the beginning, but that we may have sufficient lands there to cultivate. What we do not need we are glad for the white men to cultivate.

"I know that if my people were placed in that mountainous region lying around the head waters of the Gila River they would live in peace and act according to the will of the President. They would be prosperous and happy in tilling the soil and learning the civilization of the white men, whom they now respect. Could I but see this accomplished, I think I could forget all the wrongs that I have ever received, and die a contented and happy old man. But we can do nothing in this matter ourselves-we must wait until those

in authority choose to act. If this cannot be done during my lifetime-if I must die in bondage-I hope that the remnant of the Apache tribe may, when I am gone, be granted the one privilege, which they request-to return to Arizona.”

“Those were the words of Geronimo,” Travis said. “It is time for the Apache to return to Arizona. Will you help us?”

“We will if you will help us restore the country,” I said.

“Then we will be a thorn in the Army’s side,” he suggested. “We will use the tactics of the great Apaches and make them crazy.”

“I have many more weapons back in Roswell,” I told him, “Together with enough ammunition for a major war.”

“The Three Amigos want a piece of this,” Gary said. “But where do we start?”

“At the beginning,” Ron laughed.

“Do we get to take scalps?” Clarence asked.

“That’s up to you Clarence,” Gary said. “I have special presents put away for you two yard birds and Paladin.”

“Whatcha got, Gar-Bear?” Ron asked.

I’ll have to admit that I was curious as well. Gary had a peculiar sense of history and some very strange tastes.

“I’ve been saving some knives for a very special occasion,” he replied. “Back before the lights went out, I took some of the money we cleared from selling our house in Palmdale and ordered some knives from Randall Made Knives down in Orlando. This seems like the appropriate time to pass them out. When we get back to Roswell, you’ll all get a Randall Model 12 ‘Smithsonian Bowie’ – 11” blade, 2 ¼” wide, of ⅜” stock. Top cutting edge sharpened about 5¼”.”

“What about those nice fighting stilettos we have?” Ron asked.

“They’ll make a nice boot knife,” Gary replied.

“But you wear tennis shoes,” Clarence laughed.

“I’ve got some cowboy boots,” Gary said. “They just hurt my feet.”

“Tight leather boots or shoes can be made to fit great and be comfortable by filling them with warm water and letting them soak for about 60 seconds,” I said, “You then put them

on wet and wear them until they're dry. One day of not feeling too comfortable gives you a perfect fit for life. Someone gave me an Old Timer's Tip and I tried it. It worked out great. And as far as starting this shindig goes I think we should get everyone to Roswell and pass out those arms and ammunition."

The four of us saddled up and started back to Roswell. Since we'd been up all night grilling the soldiers, we left before first light and made 45 miles that day. Our load was a little lighter since we were absent 5 M72's and a few pounds of ammunition. The following day we made it the rest of the way back to the trailer park and we started issuing the M16's, grenades and ammo to our Apache friends. They had arrived in pickups pulling horse trailers. We also passed out some of the survival food. Gary came dragging those knives and they were very nice, but a little heavy, weighing almost 2 pounds.

"I think maybe I need a different rig," Gary said. "Could we swing by Laredo so I could pick up a Laredoan Crossdraw rig?"

The "Laredoan Crossdraw" rig features the same belt as the 1914 "Laredoan" with the addition of a matching crossdraw holster. The crossdraw holster is designed to be easily attached and removed from the belt. Its high ride design and 30° cant makes for a smooth and effortless draw. The 1914-2 allows the drawing of either of your two pistols with your strong arm, drawing the second gun after reholstering the first. The crossdraw holster is cut from the same quality leather as the "Laredoan", it is had molded for a perfect fit and has latigo hammer tie down.

We took 295 down to I-10 and on into San Antonio where we picked up I-35 and headed to Laredo. I'll have to admit that given what Gary had told me about his useless left hand this rig made a lot more sense for him. It turned out that Gary had a Vaquero that none of us knew about. It was a nickel-plated, 4⁵/₈" piece with the stag grips that matched his 7¹/₂" nickel-plated revolvers. This he wore in the canted holster. He also had his Tombstone rig with its 4⁵/₈" Vaquero. This gave him 3 revolvers readily accessible to his good hand. He wore the cross draw gun slid around front for easy access and had that Randall Bowie on the gun belt on his left side.

After we finished up in Laredo, we returned to San Antonio and to Damon who was parked in a parking lot in a stolen moving truck with a load of ANFO. We set the timer and delivered the load of fertilizer to the federal build so that they could fertilize their plants and took off for Dallas. Derek and Ron's son John together with Damon, were in one pickup pulling a 4-horse trailer and The Three Amigos and I were in a second, also pulling a 4-horse trailer.

Have Gun Will Travel – Chapter 19 – Double, Double, Toil and Trouble

A line from Macbeth? You would maybe prefer Mein Gott im Himmel or Chanson d'Amour?

The United States of America is a blended culture. I'm relatively certain that most people could translate the German to 'My God in Heaven' or the French to 'Song of Love', but how many knew the line was from Macbeth? Most thought the line was bubble, bubble, toil and trouble.

We passed through Austin and had a meal before continuing on to Dallas. If anyone was looking for us, we were unaware of it. We didn't stand out driving pickups and pulling horse trailers, except perhaps me in my Paladin Suit. We weren't cowboys though we had the 'western look'. But then, we didn't claim to be cowboys. We didn't claim to be anything. Our mode of dress helped us fit in a little better than that was all. I decided that I needed to get rid of the black shirt and pants and wear denims and a western cut shirt; I plainly stood out too much and was attracting too much attention.

How did cowboy become a bad word? To start, the term has been badly misused for years. A gunslinger was not a cowboy, although many cowboys may have been good with a six-shooter. Today's rodeo contestant is not usually a cowboy; just someone paying tribute to what cowboys did for fun. Neither is a country singer, a farmer, a card shark or a line dancer a cowboy.

A cowboy makes a living working with cattle. They earned their recognition on dangerous cattle drives running from Texas to Wyoming in the late 1800s. The average age of a cowboy was 16. That's why they were cow-boys and not cow-men. The cowboys endured blistering deserts, blinding snowstorms and bone chilling cold as they moved beef for a nation of meat lovers. They slept only a couple hours each night, often sitting in the saddle. They fought off snakes, wild cats and wolves. The handful of cowboys guarding a large herd also made a tempting target for roaming bands of marauders or Indians. If rodeo bullriding is the most dangerous eight seconds in sports, cowboying was the most dangerous eight months of life.

Many cowboys were Civil War veterans, who, unable to readjust to comfortable life on the East Coast, wandered west to make an honest living the only way they knew how – enduring hardship no one else could endure. Almost half of all working cowboys were blacks, Hispanics and Indians. There was no room for discrimination when so few were willing or able to do the job. Cowboys were not rednecks, in the negative sense the term has today of an intolerant rural white. Several black cowboys were widely admired as the best in the business. Cattle drives were integrated even before the military, which so often receives credit for valuing duty over skin tone.

The cowboy became larger than life, because they lived life so much larger than others. Western dime-store novels, and later Hollywood, made the cowboy into a mythical figure. He came to represent a rugged, independent American who chooses action over

words. Movie actors like John Wayne and Clint Eastwood made the cowboy an icon, but also associated the term more with guns, gambling and violence than with hard, humbling work. And as inevitably happens with icons which become stale and rigid metaphors, the slings and arrows of public cynicism started.

The cowboy is now the butt of jokes and an adjective meaning brash recklessness. Even those Americans who today admire the cowboy often hold large misconceptions of what the cowboy represented. The hat today often connotes racial intolerance, extreme political conservatism or a cocky disregard for civilized norms. The cowboy now regrettably represents some of the worst instead of the best of American culture. When pollsters asked Americans for the best one-word description for their commander-in-chief, they chose positive terms like “courageous,” “determined” and “decisive.” The most common term chosen as a negative description was “cowboy.” But given who the cowboys really were, aren’t those terms synonymous?

There was still a news blackout but we had mounted the SINCGARS radios in the trucks together with some CB’s for quick communications. The SINCGARS operates on any of 2320 channels and our system changed channels every day. On weeks beginning with an even number day we used the date as the channel with the month first and the day second. Thus, a call on July 4th would have been channel 0704 if the week began with an even day. If a week began with an odd numbered day, we added 1,000. Thus a call on July 4th would have been on channel 1704 if the week began with an odd day. We couldn’t use all of the channels, but it was a different channel every day and a different set every week. The CB’s were for truck-to-truck communications on the channel that was the same as the day number.

The saddle rifles were in cases behind the back seat and the illegal, military style weapons, in the toolbox together with the dynamite, etc. We wouldn’t pass a close inspection but Ritchie had gotten together with the new Police Chief and we had pads of signed Travel Permits, all showing that we were either on a hunting trip or on our way to participate in a rodeo somewhere. And not only did we have permits issued by Roswell, we had forged permits from Amarillo. All it took was a scanner and an editor to produce the genuine blank permits and someone to fill them out. It was easy to duplicate the rubber stamped signature of the Sheriff from Amarillo. You didn’t really believe he signed all of those permits personally did you?

“Crack the window a little further would you?” I asked, “The smoke is getting pretty thick in here.”

“There’s a clothing store over there,” Gary pointed out. “You said you wanted to change your clothes?”

“Yeah, I’ll save the Paladin Suit for when it means something,” I said. “Call the other truck and pull in there.”

I came out of the store a changed man. The jeans were too new and the shirt had creases from being in a package, but I didn't look like Paladin any more. I guess I looked more like a Dime Store Cowboy. I'd run everything through a washer when we stopped for the night and at least get the sizing out before I got chaffed. I'd gotten a new straw hat, too. So did Gary, claiming that it was time to 'change the oil'. He didn't discard his old hat, so I took it to mean that he now had a dress hat. That was a nice looking set of leather he'd picked up in Laredo and I picked up the cross draw holster for when I could find a second gun.

"Do we have any particular agenda in mind?" Gary asked.

"Not that I know of," I told him, "Do you have something in mind or somewhere you'd like to go to?"

"Point this truck east out of Dallas and head for Orlando," he said.

"You have something in mind?" I asked.

"Yeah, but doesn't have anything to do with our mission so everyone look for targets of opportunity where we can screw the government up," he replied taking a deep breath. "Remind me to use my nebulizer tonight when I go to bed."

"You ok?" I asked.

"He's ok, Bill," Ron said. "Gary and I just have a little COPD, no big deal."

"Maybe we shouldn't smoke in the truck," I offered.

"Now you sound like my wife," Gary laughed. "I'm going to quit smoking just as soon as it kills me."

"If I don't kill you first, partner," Ron added.

We picked up I-20 and headed east. We pulled in at the first place we could find that would allow us to get the horses out of the trailers. I gave Derek a wad of bills and told him to go get us some motel rooms. I had a duffel bag of those \$100 bills; you never knew when a little extra money would be called for. I saw a gun shop down the street and figured to go pick up the 2nd Colt after we got the horses squared around.

"Come on, Paladin," Ron said, "Let's go buy you a gun."

We were wearing our iron. Texas prohibits the open carrying of firearms, but we didn't really care, we had the multistate CCW's. They had the revolver I wanted, but there was a waiting period and the guy didn't know us. The gun was a used Colt SAA, mint bore, mint grips, 4 3/4" barrel, Like New no Box, 1980 Mfg 3rd Generation, Nickel Finish, Pearl Grips ("Only a pimp in a New Orleans whorehouse or a tin-horn gambler would

carry a pearl-handled pistol.”) I told him I’d take it and showed him my CCW. He wanted \$1,150 for the gun and told me there was a waiting period. I told him I didn’t want the pimp grips and laid down 25 \$100 bills. I walked out of there with the gun sporting a nice set of Ivory grips (Patton would have approved). The grips were \$500 extra. Money talks and BS walks and the Colt SAA hadn’t been considered a military style firearm since they’d replaced them with the .38 about 100 years ago. The grips had been swapped out from another gun in the case. I paid \$3,000 for a \$1,150 revolver, but no waiting period. What the hell, it was only money and we had piles and piles of money back at the silo.

And, speaking of Patton, Now I want you to remember that no bastard ever won a war by dying for his country. He won it by making the other poor dumb bastard die for his country. Men, all this stuff you’ve heard about America not wanting to fight, wanting to stay out of the war, is a lot of horse dung. Americans traditionally love to fight. ALL REAL Americans, love the sting of battle. When you were kids, you all admired the champion marble shooter, the fastest runner, the big league ball players, the toughest boxers... Americans love a winner and will not tolerate a loser. Americans play to win all the time. I wouldn’t give a hoot in Hell for a man who lost and laughed. That’s why Americans have never lost and will never lose a war. Because the very thought of losing is hateful to Americans. Now, an army is a team. It lives, eats, sleeps, fights as a team. This individuality stuff is a bunch of crap. The bilious bastards who wrote that stuff about individuality for the Saturday Evening Post, don’t know anything more about real battle than they do about fornicating. Now we have the finest food and equipment, the best spirit, and the best men in the world. You know... My God, I actually pity those poor bastards we’re going up against. My God, I do. We’re not just going to shoot the bastards, we’re going to cut out their living guts and use them to grease the treads of our tanks. We’re going to murder those lousy Hun bastards by the bushel. Now some of you boys, I know, are wondering whether or not you’ll chicken out under fire. Don’t worry about it. I can assure you that you’ll all do your duty. The Nazis are the enemy. Wade into them. Spill their blood, shoot them in the belly. When you put your hand into a bunch of goo, that a moment before was your best friends face, you’ll know what to do. Now there’s another thing I want you to remember. I don’t want to get any messages saying that we are holding our position. We’re not holding anything, we’ll let the Hun do that. We are advancing constantly, and we’re not interested in holding onto anything except the enemy. We’re going to hold onto him by the nose, and we’re going to kick him in the ass. We’re going to kick the hell out of him all the time, and we’re going to go through him like crap through a goose. Now, there’s one thing that you men will be able to say when you get back home, and you may thank God for it. Thirty years from now when you’re sitting around your fireside with your grandson on your knee, and he asks you, “What did you do in the great World War Two?” You won’t have to say, “Well, I shoveled shit in Louisiana.” Alright now, you sons of bitches, you know how I feel. Oh!... I will be proud to lead you wonderful guys into battle anytime, anywhere. That’s all.

That wasn’t George C. Scott. That was Patton’s speech delivered to the troops in England on May 31, 1944. He was one heroic SOB! But, not everyone liked him. One soldier actually said, “Yeah, our blood and his guts.” (One of Patton’s drivers in Europe

was a young Lieutenant named Ralph Juhl, later the Ford tractor dealer in Waverly, Iowa.)

When we got to Shreveport we found boarding for the horses and took a motel in town. This seemed like as likely place as any to start our mischief. Maybe at a place on the east side of town called Barksdale, AFB. Home to the 2d Bomb Wing and the Mighty 8th Air Force; Barksdale is situated on over 22,000 acres of land in the NW corner of Louisiana. Just 18 miles east of the Texas border and 70 miles south of Arkansas it's just a short drive to any of several large cities. Barksdale AFB is 3 hours from Dallas, TX; 6 hours from New Orleans, LA; 5 hours from Houston, TX and 3 hours from Little Rock, AR. Upon arrival, Barksdale is an easy find as Interstate 20 goes right by the base, and Interstate 49 ends just 8 miles from the base.

It was a real shame none of us were pilots, Barksdale was the home to the B-52 and the A-10 Warthogs or so we heard. We weren't looking to hurt people, rather just to create an incident and maybe damage some aircraft. As I said earlier, none of us wanted to be forced to kill American soldiers, airmen or sailors. That didn't mean that we couldn't damage a few of their precious aircraft. Those A-10's were hard kills so I got out the Barrett rifle and did some long range sniping. I'm not sure how many Stratofortress engines I damaged, but more than enough to get their attention. They went to an alert status and we got the hell out of there.

A call to Ritchie reveal that our Apache brethren were having a great time scaring the living crap out of soldiers stationed at various Army posts. Unfortunately the 'cousins' as The Three Amigos called them weren't quite so particular about whether they scared the troops or killed them. Ritchie said that they had passed on taking scalps because to do so would point a finger right to the Indian tribes. That got quite a reaction out of Clarence, he'd been working on the Bowie knife Gary had given him and it was literally razor sharp.

Nothing happens in a vacuum and we figured that it wouldn't do for us to remain in the area. The next morning we loaded up the horses for a long day on the road. We took I-49 to Lafayette, LA and headed east on I-10, only then realizing that we could have taken I-10 east out of San Antonio through Houston and ended up right where we were. But, as I've said we had no particular agenda. By flopping around like a dying fish we were making it harder for anyone to define our route. Conversely, we were exposing ourselves to more people. We pushed hard that day ending up in Tallahassee, FL. We took the next day off to rest the horses and ourselves. Two days later we were off early making our way to I-75. We followed it south to Florida's Turnpike and that into Orlando.

The next morning Gary and Ron took off in the pickup and returned about 4 hours later. This time, Gary had 10 packages. The first 3 packages contain more of the Bowie knives, one each for Damon, Derek and John. The other 7 packages were identical and contained, of all things, Randall's Model 13 "Arkansas Toothpick" – 12" blade, 1½" wide of ¼" stock. 5" leather handle with a brass lugged hilt and Duralumin butt cap. The knives were replicas of the historic stiletto-dagger famous in Confederate days. Is all

this old fart thought about was guns and knives? Each of the amigos now sported 3 of each, but they hadn't started to clank, yet. We took I-4 over to I-95 and lodged the horses and ourselves. It was becoming a little difficult to find lodging for the animals.

"Anyone have any ideas where we should go from here?" I asked.

"We'd play hell going east very far," Ron laughed.

"North ok with everybody?" I asked.

"Hell yeah," Gary said, "Maybe we can make it all the way to Savannah."

It turned out that given our late start we were lucky to make Jacksonville. Later that evening, Gary came to my room and wondered aloud what the odds were we could take out Ms. Rice. I explained to him that the Secret Service did an excellent job of guarding the President. He, in turn, pointed out that I was a trained professional assassin, that I had a rather fancy Barrett rifle available that was last sighted in by me and that even Presidents screwed up. I told him he had no idea what a toll that killing undeserving people took on a person. He countered with his opinion that there was perhaps no more deserving person than Madam President. Anyone, he said, who would suspend the Constitution didn't deserve to live. I told him that I'd think about it.

We left early the next morning after picking up the horses. It was over 700 miles to Washington, DC. I told the fellas that we could go there but I was still considering something that Gary and I talked about and therefore had no idea what we'd do when we got there. Gary suggested that we head for Cunningham Falls State Park. At the time, it didn't occur to anyone that the park was adjacent to Catoctin Mountain National Park, the home of Camp David.

It took us 2 days to get to Cunningham Falls State Park. During the course of the journey, I had decided that I might take the 'contract' and told Gary to give me \$1. I was a businessman, after all, and I had to charge a fee for this type of service, no matter how minimal. I didn't think much would come of it, but I was now contracted to kill the President of the United States. But, unlike John Malkovich, I wasn't trying to right some perceived wrong. I was simply carrying out a contract.

Have Gun Will Travel – Chapter 20 – Filling the Contract

I had to think long and hard about Gary's suggestion that the President should be eliminated. I considered many things like the fact that she was 4th in the line of succession and was never really intended to be President. Then I considered how she came to be President. The sergeant hadn't said how Bush had died; only that he was dead. Everyone knew about Cheney's heart but even the sergeant thought the accident that had taken out the next 2 people in the line of succession was "a very strange deal". I didn't really know much about the woman; only that she had ties to the first Bush administration when I was still with the Agency. But the idea of a palace coup wasn't all that unreasonable, it happened all the time, in other countries.

The Camp is operated by Navy personnel, and troops from the Marine Barracks in Washington, DC, provide permanent security. Marine One carries the President during the half-hour helicopter ride from our Nation's capital. Guests at Camp David can enjoy a pool, putting green, driving range, tennis courts, gymnasium, and the many guest cabins – Dogwood, Maple, Holly, Birch, and Rosebud, to name a few. The presidential cabin is called Aspen Lodge. The Presidential retreat is not open or accessible to the public, but the eastern hardwood forest of Catoctin Mountain Park has many other attractions for visitors: camping, picnicking, fishing, 25 miles of hiking trails, scenic mountain vistas, all await exploration.

In 1952 Truman approved a compromise under which the land north of Maryland Route 77 would remain Catoctin Mountain Park operated by the National Park Service and the land south of Maryland Route 77 would become Cunningham Falls State Park. The official transfer took effect in 1954. President Eisenhower renamed the retreat, after he took office in 1953, "Camp David," after his grandson.

As you no doubt knew, I preferred to have a lot of information about my targets. The web was down and would remain so for an indeterminate period of time. I realized that I was going to need to develop all of my own intelligence to even attempt this job. Without doubt, these Marines would be a few good men and maybe not so few, but definitely very good. It would take all of my skills and I wasn't in the shape I'd been back when I'd been really active. I decided that I needed to run to try and get back into shape. And it couldn't be a simple jog; I was going to have to test their perimeter at the same time I was getting in shape. There wasn't any time table just that the job had to get done before Madam President had the country in an even worse mess than it presently was in. I started out slowly with the jogging, loosening up a little first and taking it easy for the first few days.

Hell, I didn't even have a good idea where in that forest Camp David was. By searching maps I found the probable location. My scouting revealed that I was correct but the place was guarded better than the White House. The 132-acre camp put most everything out of the range of my Barrett. I gave it some thought and got on the radio to Ritchie.

“White Knight calling Whiz Kid,” I sent.

“Yeah boss,” Ritchie answered.

“Translate. Gamma minus one. Working part times four. ASAP,” I transmitted.

“Rog, 10-20?” Ritchie replied.

“Hagerstown,” I replied.

“10-4, 48,” he replied.

Gary was standing there listening and his mental gears were churning to the point there was almost smoke coming from his ears. He got a puzzled look and then brightened considerably. A look of awe came over his face.

“You have Stingers?” he asked.

I smiled. Gamma is the 3rd letter of the Greek alphabet. Gamma minus one is Beta. Translated to English was the letter B. The working part of a Bee is the Stinger and I had told Ritchie to bring me 4 as soon as possible. Ritchie had replied that it would take about 48 hours to bring them and wanted to know where he should deliver them. By prearrangement, I'd give him the name of a nearby city and he'd meet me at the first service station south of the city; or if the city only ran east-west the first station east of the city.

The Stinger is a man-portable, shoulder-fired guided missile system, which enables the soldier to effectively engage low-altitude jet, propeller-driven and helicopter aircraft. Developed by the United States Army Missile Command, the Stinger was the successor to the Redeye Weapon System. The system is a “fire-and-forget” weapon employing a passive infrared seeker and proportional navigation system. Stinger also is designed for the threat beyond the 1990s, with an all-aspect engagement capability, and IFF (Identification-Friend-or-Foe), improved range and maneuverability, and significant countermeasures immunity. The missile, packaged within its disposable launch tube, is delivered as a certified round, requiring no field testing or direct support maintenance. A separable, reusable grip stock is attached to the round prior to use and may be used again.

Ritchie had reprogrammed our Stingers to eliminate the IFF feature (used a terst Jumper plug). Don't you just love it when you have one of the 10 best hackers in the world on your staff? I told Ritchie was a genius, didn't I? Two days later we met up with Ritchie at a service station outside of Hagerstown. He followed me to an out of the way location and we transferred the Stingers to the pickup and covered them with a tarp.

“What's up, boss?” Ritchie asked.

"I took a new contract," I told him.

"Anyone I know?" he asked.

"Condoleezza Rice."

"Don't let this Paladin thing go to your head," he said. "How much are we getting for this contract?"

"\$1," I replied.

"\$1?" he echoed, starting to come unglued. "Have you lost your mind? I thought you had retired."

"I had, but this came up and under the circumstances, it was something I felt I had to do," I replied.

"So who's the contractor?" he asked.

"Gary," I said.

"He hired you to assassinate the President of the United States and only offered a dollar?" Ritchie was shocked.

"He didn't offer me anything," I explained. "The dollar was my idea to make the contract binding."

"Assuming you can off the Prez," Ritchie expounded, "Who are you going after next, the Joint Chiefs? Or maybe you'll just take on the whole Marine Corps singled handed?"

"Chill Ritchie, it will be a piece of cake," I said not believing it myself.

"I almost forgot," Ritchie said, "I have a present for you."

"Thanks," I said taking the Colt revolver box.

"It's not from me," he said. "Gary called Sharon and Sharon got it, whatever it is. I didn't even look in the box."

The box contained a Colt SAA, nickel-plated, 7½" barrel, with real Ivory grips. It matched my new used Colt that I had picked up outside of Dallas. I wasn't aware but a company or two still produced genuine ivory grips. Gary must have sent a message to Sharon and put her up to this. No doubt she had some of his proclivity for guns. After we got back to Cunningham Falls State Park, I went to thank him and he started laying questions on me.

“How are you going to defeat the ammonia sniffer?” he asked.

“What are you talking about?” I wanted to know because he lost me on the turn.

“In that Charles Bronson movie called *Assassination*, Bronson mounted an ammonia detector in a look-alike Marine-One and detected the sniper at long range,” Gary explained. “Only humans and monkeys give off ammonia.”

“Really?” I replied, somewhat astonished. “Personally, I’d be more worried about FLIR.”

“Yeah, that too,” Gary said. “How are you going to pull this off?”

“Sooner or later the President is going to come to Camp David,” I explained. “We’ll probably see Marine-One come in. I propose to position us to the east of the Camp in the general flight path the chopper takes. We’ll have to do something to mask my body heat. When the chopper leaves, I’ll hear it and pop up as it passes over and let a Stinger fly. What could be more simple?”

“That doesn’t cover the ammonia problem,” he said.

“So go to the store and buy a few gallons of ammonia and you and the amigos can spread it around after the chopper comes in,” I laughed, not really convinced but humoring the old man.

“I get a discount if we help?” he kidded.

“Sorry,” I said, “It has to be a full dollar to make the contract legal.”

“How can a contract to murder someone be legal?” he asked.

“Don’t get the legality of the contract itself mixed up with the legality of the act itself,” I retorted.

“A contract to perform an illegal act is null and void on its face,” he replied. “But what the hell, we’ll help you at no extra charge.”

Rice didn’t show up for about 3 weeks. It gave me plenty of time to scout a good location. An earlier flight by Marine-One gave me some idea of a route they might take. I didn’t know whether Rice was on that chopper or not, but it hadn’t been at Camp David long enough to discharge any passengers, so I had to let it go. I dug a hole on the eastern side of a low hill and hung some Real Tree camouflage netting over the entrance. The sound of the choppers rotors echoing off the opposing hill would give me ample notice of the chopper passing over. As insurance, I decided to spot The Three Amigos in the area with FRS radios. Gary made sure they all had a gallon of ammonia and their Super Match rifles.

It wasn't that long before Marine-One showed up again and didn't leave right away. I figure that Madam President was now at Camp David. It was a Friday when it came in and I wasn't really sure if she was spending the weekend or what. Marine-One took off a little later, I presumed to refuel. I told the boys that as soon as it returned we should head for our spots. Ron and Gary both said no to that; they said that if Marine-One came in and Rice was ready to leave we wouldn't have time. They suggested that we move everything we had to a distant location except for the one pickup, just in case the Secret Service got on to us.

I couldn't argue with their logic and I took a Stinger and headed for my hole. Clarence trailed along with my backup missile. He dropped it off and I crawled in that hole to wait. As far as a backup went, I didn't think I'd need it. If the first missile missed there wouldn't be a second chance. It would be, in any case, cut and run. I guess I sat in that hole all of Friday night, all of Saturday and early on Sunday morning I heard Marine-One returning.

"Heads up fellas," I announced on the FRS radio.

I received 2 clicks from each of The Three Amigos. About a half-hour later, Ron announced, "Here she comes."

I flipped aside the camouflage netting and got ready.

Whump-Whump-Whump the big chopper passed right overhead. I lined up the Stinger acquired the target and let her rip. I guess I must have been in their blind spot because they didn't react at first. But, the Marine Corp pilot did his very best to evade the missile. Marine-One exploded in a ball of flames and I grabbed the second Stinger and headed to the truck as fast as I could manage hauling 35 pounds of awkward weight. I was almost to the truck when another chopper appeared. I figured this to be Secret Service and used the second Stinger to bring it down. Right about then, the fellas showed up and we piled in the pickup and headed up to Hagerstown to join up with the other truck.

"When we get to Hagerstown, find 416 and take it up to Mercersburg, Pennsylvania," Gary suggested. "I have all kind of relatives in Mercersburg and McConnellsburg."

Gary had a lot of cousins in the area, and I'm not talking Indians here. It seems that his grandfather and grandfather's brother were born in McConnellsburg and had moved to Iowa as young men. He said he'd only been there once, maybe in 1956, he couldn't remember. I guess not, that had been 50 years before! We were distributed among the cousins' homes and they all thought it strange that we were dressed up like a bunch of cowboys. I really got their attention when I dressed up as Paladin.

"That's not right," Gary's cousin said. "Paladin only had 1 pistol, not 2. And it was blued not nickel-plated. But, the holster's right. Say did you boys know that someone shot down Marine-One and killed Condi Rice?"

“Really?” Gary said, “When did that happen and what was she doing in the chopper, going to meet Bush?”

“Bush is dead,” the cousin said. “And after Cheney died, she was the next living person in line.”

“Bush is dead?” Gary said, “What happened?”

“Heart surgery,” the cousin said, “Then he threw a clot.”

“What happened to Cheney?” Gary asked.

“Heart attack,” the cousin replied.

“But the Speaker of the House would be next in line, followed by the President Pro Tem of the Senate,” Gary played the fiddle.

“Car accident,” the cousin said, “Got them both.”

“Doesn’t it seem just a little strange to you that Bush needed heart surgery and then died?” Gary asked. “Followed by the death of the Vice President and the next two people in the line of succession?”

“Washington is a real pressure cooker,” the cousin said, “A lot of people have been dying lately. I meant to ask you, what brings you to Pennsylvania?”

“We’re doing some rodeo work and are in between contracts,” I explained.

Have Gun Will Travel – Chapter 21 – A Working Partnership

Gary's relatives were a little too much eastern establishment liberals to suit my tastes. On the other hand, they were only about 110 miles outside of Washington and seemed to have a lot of knowledge about things that were going on in the place. I was a little antsy and really wanted to move on. One day Gary came rushing to my side.

"Pack up, we're leaving," he said.

"Why?" I asked, "They said they're having ham tonight."

"Exactly," he said.

It turns out that when Gary had gone back to visit his relatives in Pennsylvania back in 1956, they'd had one of those 'home-cured Smithfield' hams. He claimed that that ham smelled like a puppy that had been locked in a hot car all day and had emptied its bladder a 100 times. We left immediately. While we were traveling to only God knows where, Gary reminded me of Gordon Sinclair and his little speech called 'The Americans'. Broadcast on June 5, 1973 by CFRB, Toronto, Ontario, Gary could recite the entire speech by heart.

The United States dollar took another pounding on German, French and British exchanges this morning, hitting the lowest point ever known in West Germany. It has declined there by 41% since 1971 and this Canadian thinks it is time to speak up for the Americans as the most generous and possibly the least-appreciated people in all the earth.

As long as sixty years ago, when I first started to read newspapers, I read of floods on the Yellow River and the Yangtze. Who rushed in with men and money to help? The Americans did.

They have helped control floods on the Nile, the Amazon, the Ganges and the Niger. Today, the rich bottom land of the Mississippi is under water and no foreign land has sent a dollar to help. Germany, Japan and, to a lesser extent, Britain and Italy, were lifted out of the debris of war by the Americans who poured in billions of dollars and forgave other billions in debts. None of those countries is today paying even the interest on its remaining debts to the United States.

When the franc was in danger of collapsing in 1956, it was the Americans who propped it up and their reward was to be insulted and swindled on the streets of Paris. I was there. I saw it.

When distant cities are hit by earthquakes, it is the United States that hurries into help... Managua Nicaragua is one of the most recent examples. So far this spring, 59 American communities have been flattened by tornadoes. Nobody has helped.

The Marshall Plan... the Truman Policy... all pumped billions upon billions of dollars into discouraged countries. Now, newspapers in those countries are writing about the decadent war-mongering Americans.

I'd like to see one of those countries that is gloating over the erosion of the United States dollar build its own airplanes.

Come on... let's hear it! Does any other country in the world have a plane to equal the Boeing Jumbo Jet, the Lockheed Tristar or the Douglas DC-10? If so, why don't they fly them? Why do all international lines except Russia fly American planes? Why does no other land on earth even consider putting a man or women on the moon?

You talk about Japanese technocracy and you get radios. You talk about German technocracy and you get automobiles. You talk about American technocracy and you find men on the moon, not once, but several times... and safely home again. You talk about scandals and the Americans put theirs right in the store window for everyone to look at. Even the draft dodgers are not pursued and hounded. They are here on our streets, most of them... unless they are breaking Canadian laws... are getting American dollars from Ma and Pa at home to spend here.

When the Americans get out of this bind ... as they will... who could blame them if they said 'the hell with the rest of the world'. Let someone else buy the Israel bonds, Let someone else build or repair foreign dams or design foreign buildings that won't shake apart in earthquakes.

When the railways of France, Germany and India were breaking down through age, it was the Americans who rebuilt them. When the Pennsylvania Railroad and the New York Central went broke, nobody loaned them an old caboose. Both are still broke. I can name to you 5,000 times when the Americans raced to the help of other people in trouble.

Can you name me even one time when someone else raced to the Americans in trouble? I don't think there was outside help even during the San Francisco earthquake.

Our neighbors have faced it alone and I am one Canadian who is darn tired of hearing them kicked around. They will come out of this thing with their flag high. And when they do, they are entitled to thumb their nose at the lands that are gloating over their present troubles.

I hope Canada is not one of these. But there are many smug, self-righteous Canadians. And finally, the American Red Cross was told at its 48th Annual meeting in New Orleans this morning that it was broke.

This year's disasters... with the year less than half-over... has taken it all and nobody...but nobody... has helped.

Gary went on to say that around Christmas of 2004 when that giant tsunami wiped out 155,000 people maybe more, and some Norwegian criticized the United States for being stingy, he immediately thought of Gordon Sinclair. Sinclair had died 17May84 and the world lost a champion of the noble cause. All of the money Sinclair made from his writing and recording of "The Americans, A Canadian Opinion" which praised the international efforts of the United States in the face of overwhelming world criticism at the time and his recording, backed by the stirring rendition of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," was a huge success, with all proceeds from the sale going to the International Red Cross.

Canada didn't seem to feel that way about the United States anymore. Do you suppose that American objections to Canada being a haven for draft dodgers and terrorists 'coming to America' were the cause? Or, maybe it was the Iraqi war? The country of México showed its appreciation for NATFA by sending many of its citizens to the US to look for work. Ross Perot had been right about that one. During the debates, one question Perot was continually asked could he, as an independent, govern?

Perot responded:

"Can we govern?... I love that one. The 'we' is you and me. You bet your hat we can govern because we will be there together and we will figure out what to do and you won't tolerate gridlock, you won't tolerate endless meandering and wandering around, and you won't tolerate non-performance. And believe me, anybody that knows me understands I have a very low tolerance for non-performance also. Together we can get anything done."

I was along for the ride and we ended up boarding the horses at a stable just outside of Washington and getting a motel. It turned out that we were in the area northwest of Washington known by many as Bull Run (after the creek) and Manassas by others (name of the community). It seemed appropriate to visit the battlefield and we doctored up 60-day travel permits that showed us as historians studying the Civil War. The 3 younger men were research assistants and we were the historians. It was prophetic in a way, we were starting a little Civil War of our own, I just didn't know it at the time. You Johnny Rebs don't tell me how you kicked the Union's ass and I won't mention how you almost lost. That war is over fellas and nobody won.

There wasn't a Senate to confirm a Vice President for Madam President and she had been running the office without backup. When Marine-One went down, the Director of Homeland Security, the last man on the list, Rudolph Giuliani, became the new President. We certainly could have done worse, I suppose. All of the other Cabinet members had resigned, including SecDef. I'll bet Rumsfeld was sorry he'd done that. Out at the battlefield The Three Amigos cornered me.

"We make one hell of a team," Ron said.

"I'll second the motion," Clarence added.

Gary was uncharacteristically silent.

"You don't seem have much to say," I observed.

"I was just thinking, Bill," he replied. "There are 7 of us and about 2½ million of them. Those seem like pretty fair odds considering how good you are and how clever we are. What say we team up and restore this government to the people?"

"Yeah right, 7 guys against the entire US military," I laughed.

"I was thinking we'd be the Chiefs and the Apaches could be the Indians," he smirked.

Well hell, that improved the odds considerably, didn't it? Instead of 7 to 2.5 million it would be 1,007 to 2.5 million. On the other hand, I now owed him for the new Colt.

"Well why not?" I said. "You hold 'em and I'll shoot 'em."

"Do you think that the sergeant and corporal out in New Mexico went back to that encampment?" he asked.

Probably not," I allowed.

"The first Man in Black was Hopalong Cassidy. Johnny Cash and Paladin came along about the same time," he said. "In 1957, Cash made his first appearance at the Grand Ole Opry. And by 1958, he'd published 50 songs, sold more than 6 million records and moved to the Columbia label. It was at the Opry that Cash became known as *The Man in Black*. *Have Gun Will Travel* premiered in 1957, too. Never mind those silly alien movies; you're our Man in Black. Those soldiers respected what you represented, I believe. We owe it to them and their not going back to help this nation."

"Did it take you a long time to write that speech?" I asked. "Ok, we'll do it, but Stacy will never forgive you if you get me killed."

"Call Ritchie and get all of the Bee parts you have," he laughed.

Now I'd gone and done it. I had stuck my foot in a really deep pile. How did Gary think that a thousand people could save the country? I let the fellas think they were running the show and when something they suggested made sense, we'd try it. If it didn't make sense I'd talk them out of it. I hadn't allowed for how bullheaded Gary could get. We'd already agreed and shaken hands on it when Ron came around and warned me about Gary being stubborn. I told Ron that a deal was a deal and I was counting on him and Clarence to sit on Gary when sitting was needed. I should have known better to trust Ron or Clarence.

"White Knight calling Whiz Kid," I sent.

“Yeah boss,” Ritchie answered.

“Bring me the rest of the Bee parts,” I instructed.

“You want ALL of them?” he asked.

“How many do we have?” I inquired.

“One semi load departing for points east, he laughed. “Where do you want them?”

“Bull Run, check your history,” I replied. “And bring the cousins.”

“ALL of them?” he asked.

“10-4, clear.” I replied.

“10-4, 96,” Ritchie said.

I could just picture a thousand bloodthirsty savages being led by 7 men on horses charging the modern Army at 3rd Manassas. I didn't know that the thought would turn out to be about ½ right. Hey if there are any of you Johnny Rebs out there we're at the Best Western Battlefield Inn. Just ask for Paladin and company. I hoped Ritchie would think to bring more money, I only had a single duffle bag full and that was a lot of mouths to feed, 1,007 horses and 1,007 men, give or take.

“The stuff you wanted is in the trailer, Boss,” Ritchie said. “I hope you won't mind if I don't stay.”

“You didn't happen to thing to bring me some money, did you?” I asked.

“2 bags, full,” he said, “Just like Baa Baa Black Sheep.”

“That was 3 bags full, Ritchie,” I said.

“One for my Master and one for my Dame,” Ritchie recited, “But none for the little boy who cries in the lane. I brought you 2 bags and you'll just have to make do. But I brought all of our weapons and ammunition.”

“What did you do for the Indians for travel permits?” I asked.

“They are re-enactors,” he said, “They here to re-enact the battle of the Little Big Horn.”

“That battle was in Montana,” I told him.

“You can bill it as the Buffalo Bill Cody, Jr. Wild West Show,” he said.

“And invite all of the top brass from Washington to watch the show,” I replied.

“Only instead of blanks, you’ll be using real bullets,” he chuckled. “I printed up some Posters in case you liked the idea.”

Pretty clever this Ritchie; I went to tell Gary about his idea.

“Yeah, yeah I heard,” he said. “The cousins told me. We’re thinking about making Ritchie the 4th amigo.”

I was crushed. After all I had done for these guys; they were making Ritchie the 4th amigo instead of me. How ungrateful could 3 men be? But a deal was a deal. Then Gary came dragging a silver star like the US Marshals wore in the old west. Each of The Three Amigos was wearing one and so was Ritchie. He handed me a jewelry case and it contained my star. Was I Marshall Dillon now or Paladin? Marshal Paladin didn’t have a ring to it. All I really needed to change my image was a little silver horse head, a Paladin, for my crossdraw holster, and Ritchie saw to that.

At the first battle of Manassas, about 3,000 Yanks and 2,000 Rebs died. Second Manassas had been a bloody affair. With any luck, the 3rd battle of Manassas would be limited to Union casualties. We weren’t sure how to separate the men from the women. Gary said that his friend Fleataxi said just to kill them all and let God sort it out. And, since the 2nd World War, that did seem to be everyone’s attitude. Blame it on the Nazi’s they started the killing of unarmed civilians.

As the leader of the most powerful nation in the World, the President was responsible to more than just the population of the United States. Obviously many around the world felt that the President was individually accountable to each and every individual in the World. That seems totally unreasonable to me. The President was only accountable to the American voters, regardless what that fellow from Norway said. If Norway wanted to give all of their money to a bunch of people in Indonesia, Thailand and Sri Lanka who hated us except when they needed something, how was that the President’s fault? No doubt before it were all said and done, the US would turn out to be the largest contributor anyway. There were all of those ships and airplanes, etc. The US would end up spending about 100 million for every American killed. But wait, that’s off the subject, isn’t it?